

Next Generation Mermaid 3

by Asuki Star

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Summary: Sequel to Next Generation Mermaids 2. A year after they first met, everything seems fine. Suddenly Sarah, Emily and Amber get a vision of a girl. Who is she? At the same time strange attacks start to occur, not only directed at themselves, but normal people as well. What does it mean and is there a connection between the two? I'm bad at summaries. Story is better. Please R&R.

1. Visions

****Disclaimer:** I don't own H2O, but I'm seriously glad someone brought it on TV.**

****A/N:** I'm back from my break. I'm sorry it took so long, but I'm thrilled that so many are interested in a third installment. This is the sequel to the sequel of Next Generation Mermaids. To understand everything I recommend reading the other two stories before going on to this one. Emily, Amber and Sarah are still the main characters with Emma, Rikki and Cleo in minor roles. Now without further wait here is the 1st chapter of Next Generation Mermaid 3. Enjoy!

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Chapter 1: Visions

"Thanks so much for helping me, Rachel," Sarah said to brunette standing next to her. They were in Sarah's kitchen, which looked like a war had raged there. Dirty bowls, utensils and many other things were scattered across the counter tops.

"You're welcome. It's my pleasure to help, actually. I mean, how many times does a one year anniversary come around?" Rachel replied as she placed some of the dishes in the dishwasher.

"As far as I know, once, but who knows how that is with mermaids," Sarah joked.

"I'm sure Emily and Amber will love it," Rachel told her.

"I don't know. I'm not even sure, if they realize that as of tonight, it's been one year since we first transformed," Sarah admitted, softly.

"What? Come on. How can you even think that?" Rachel demanded to know.

"Because, we haven't once talked about it. It seems like they completely forgot," Sarah explained, sadly.

"So that's why you're throwing a surprise party for them?" Rachel confirmed, "I think it's a great idea and even though I can't believe that Emily and Amber, okay at least Emily, wouldn't forget your anniversary, I don't think you should give up on them." Sarah nodded, a small smile on her face. "Just like these three stones are together, you will never part. You will always think the same," Rachel continued, holding up the necklace with the three stones that she had gotten from them.

"Okay, okay, I get it. No more negative thoughts," Sarah smiled with a small chuckle, "You're really good at cheering people up, though the stone analogy was a bit too much."

"I try," Rachel replied, grinning with a shrug.

"Wow, something sure smells good," Cleo said, coming into the kitchen.

"Let's hope it tastes as good as it smells," Rachel replied, smiling.

"So it's already been a year?" Cleo asked, "Time sure does fly."

"Sure does," Sarah agreed, "It only seems like yesterday, when Amber, Emily and I first met, found Mako and transformed into mermaids for the first time."

"And not much later brought Rikki, Emma and me back together," Cleo reminded her, "We owe you more than we can ever repay."

"More importantly we brought you and Lewis back together," Sarah pointed out and Cleo nodded in agreement.

"Speaking of which, how are you doing?" Rachel asked, looking at Cleo's big stomach.

"As well as one can be in the 8th month. He's being very lively," Cleo smiled, placing her hand on the bulge that the baby made.

"If you can look past the constant craving for sardines," Sarah teased, playfully.

"I don't have it that often anymore," Cleo protested.

"Well, a sardine craving makes sense with a former mermaid," Rachel pointed out and they had to laugh.

"I wonder if it will be a girl or a boy," Sarah wondered, aloud, placing a hand on her mother's stomach, "I can't wait to be big sister."

"We'll find out once it's born," Cleo replied.

"What if it's a girl? Could she also become a mermaid?" Rachel inquired.

"Well that's unlikely," someone said and they turned around to see Lewis walk in, who wrapped his arms around his wife from behind.

"Why do you say that?" Rachel asked.

"Because Cleo isn't a mermaid anymore. Her genes transferred to Sarah when she was born. That makes it pretty much impossible for the baby to have the mermaid gene, if it does turn out to be a girl," Lewis explained, causally.

"So you're saying it'll be a boy?" Cleo questioned.

"Well, obviously. I can't be overrun by a household full of girls," Lewis joked, making the women of the family look at him hard.

"Just you wait and see," Cleo warned as they left the kitchen.

The two girls looked after them for a bit and then grinned broadly. "Your parents really love each other," Rachel remarked and Sarah nodded, "I'll take the food with me, if that's okay with you."

"That would be great," Sarah replied as she packed the cake and several small cupcakes into a basket.

"I'll call you once I'm there so that we can set everything up," Rachel told her, "Don't worry, they won't know what hit them." She winked at the other brunette.

"You're the best," Sarah smiled and guided her to the door.

Rachel walked along the road, her mind thinking of tonight. Everything was going according to plan. It would be perfect, she thought as she smiled to herself. Luckily her house was not too far away and she soon arrived.

Carefully she opened the door to see if her mother was there. She heard nothing and quietly entered, not wanting to draw attention to her presence. In the kitchen she placed the basket on the counter, then went to the cupboard where she kept two more baskets. Opening each of them, she looked inside. How was she going to do this? Finally she unpacked all the baskets, spreading all the contents around the kitchen, where there was room. After that she got out some stuff of her own out of the fridge, beginning to pack the baskets anew.

"What are you up to?" Charlotte asked, coming into the kitchen and seeing the amounts of food everywhere, "Is there a birthday that I missed?"

"Not really. It's Sarah's, Emily's and Amber's one year anniversary,"

Rachel replied, noticing that her mother's eyes narrowed at the mention of her friend's names.

"I'm amazed that they remember the exact date. Most people don't," Charlotte said, casually. Was there a hint of suspicion in her voice, Rachel wondered.

"They met on the first day of camp and since they could easily check online they knew," Rachel half lied. She resumed packing two baskets, trying to ignore her mother as best as possible. She hated how her mother always reacted to any topic regarding her former mermaid enemies.

"But why did they invite you? You only met them a while later. I would I imagine that they would want to celebrate alone," Charlotte replied.

That did it for Rachel. She slammed her hands on the counter and snapped, "Listen mom, just because you didn't get along with their mothers, doesn't mean that I can't be friends with them. It's my choice, not yours."

Charlotte glared at her daughter. "So you're on their side now?" the mother accused.

"I'm not on anyone's side," Rachel protested, annoyed, "If you have a problem with them, take it out on them, not me."

"You've been distancing yourself from me ever since we moved here and especially after your stay in the hospital," Charlotte told her, angrily.

"I'm not distancing myself, but you're making it pretty hard not to," Rachel snapped and with that grabbed the two baskets of food she had prepared, "Now if you'll excuse me, I'm leaving." She stormed out of the kitchen. Charlotte stared after her daughter enraged.

Outside Rachel stormed down the street, only to stop a few houses later. She stood in front of a vacant house and made sure no one was watching before she went into its backyard. Only there did she halt to take several deep breaths to calm herself. It's not that she hated her mother, but how she looked down on her friends had drawn a line between them.

It was because of such antics that Rachel kept the motorboat, which she got from Lewis, at the dock of this vacant house and not at her own. Her mother would only ask questions. She slowly walked down the dock to the anchored boat. After placing the baskets in the boat, Rachel got in herself and drove off.

Yearning she looked at the water as she made her way to Mako. How she wanted to swim there, but that was impossible. It has been impossible for nearly a year. When she was with the others, of course, she didn't mention it. They saved her life and that was no way to repay them. The only person, who she had confined her true feelings to, was Alex, her boyfriend, but sadly his exchange year had ended and he had return back to their hometown. Now they only saw each other on rare occasions, but they often talked, wrote letters, and wrote messages online. With a sigh Rachel looked back up at Mako Island, seeing that the sun was getting ready to set soon.

* * *

><p>Sarah sat on her bed, staring at the ceiling. She anxiously awaited Rachel's call. Soon she found herself pacing the length of her room. What was taking Rachel so long? The sun was slowly setting. Just as Sarah had walked over to her window to enjoy the sunset over Mako, her phone rang. Quickly Sarah looked at the message. "Sorry that it took so long. You can come now," it read.<p>

Having read the message, Sarah took off like a race car driver when a race started. "Have fun!" she heard her mother call after her as she was already out the door. Taking the dock as a diving board, Sarah dove into the water and zoomed off.

The setting sun transformed the already beautiful underwater scenery into an almost magical panorama. Sarah slowed to enjoy it. How had she ever hated swimming? Just as she reached Mako, Sarah thought she saw something swim in front of her. Was it her imagination. "Probably a fish," Sarah reasoned with herself as she swam into the underwater entrance to the moon pool.

Just as she was about to surface, Sarah realized what she had seen. Breaking the water, she stared into the faces of her two mermaid friends, who seemed just as shocked to see Sarah as she was to see them. "Emily, Amber?" Sarah said, surprised to see her friends.

"Amber, Sarah," Emily added.

"Sarah, Emily," Amber muttered.

"What are you doing here?" they all said in unison, "Rachel called me here. What are you talking about?" Confused they stared at each other.

"Then where is Rachel?" Emily finally asked.

"I'm over here," a voice said, making them look up to the entrance of the cave and they gasped. In the midst of an array of different dishes, ranging from cake to fruit to ice cream, stood Rachel with a broad smile on her face.

"Rachel," they muttered, surprised.

"Happy one year anniversary," she smiled.

"Did you make all this for us?" Amber questioned, astonished.

"Take a closer look," Rachel told them and then they realized it.

"That's my cake," Sarah said.

"And my fruit," Emily added. "

Over there's my ice cream," Amber noticed.

"Wait a minute. Did you say your food?" the girls questioned at the same time.

"Don't you get it yet?" Rachel asked, smirking, "You each thought the others forgot and wanted to throw a secret party. You needed help and came to me. You're more alike than you think." The mermaids stared at each other astonished. Then they hugged.

"You really remembered our anniversary?" Emily asked Amber.

Blushing, Amber turned her head away and muttered, "Only by chance." The girls smiled, knowing Amber was lying and just didn't want to admit it.

"But what about the rest?" Emily asked, noticing that there were still several other dishes unclaimed.

"I made those," Rachel smiled.

"Come here you," Amber said and pulled Rachel into the water. Coming up sputtering, she was quickly embraced by the three mermaids.

Then they sat down, ate, talked and just enjoyed themselves. Rachel only half listened in though. She was unusually solemn. The argument with her mother had been one of many this past year since she became a mermaid. She suspected that her mother knew quite well what was going on that that that made things even worse. Her mother had never overcome the past, which annoyed Rachel to a certain extent.

"Is everything alright?" Sarah asked, observing their friend's quietness. Rachel looked up, having been ripped from her thoughts, with a smile,

"I'm fine. Just thought of something. It's not important." The mermaids, though they didn't really believe Rachel, didn't push the matter. She would tell them on her own terms soon enough.

"We ran out of ice cubes. I'll make some new ones," Emily noticed, trying to get off the subject, "Sarah will you help me?"

The brunette nodded, coming over to make water balls while Amber remarked, "How about a small campfire? There's some wood over there."

"That would be great," Rachel replied, piling up the branches and logs. Using her magic, Amber ignited the logs. Watching her friends, Rachel felt strange for a fraction of a second.

Suddenly Rachel's necklace, more accurately the three stones, began to glow. "What theâ€¦!" the four girls exclaimed as the blue light grew more and more intense, blinding them and making them let go of their magic. In front of their eyes flashed an image. A girl. She had blonde, wavy hair and beautiful blue eyes. She must have been around the same age as Sarah, Amber, Emily and Rachel, but she looked pretty shy.

Just as quickly as the image came, it was gone, along with the blue light. The girls rubbed their eyes, which hurt from the light. "What was that about?" Amber asked.

"I don't know, but did you seeâ€¦," Sarah began and Rachel ended, "A

girl? Yes."

"But why?" Emily questioned, staring at Rachel's necklace, "It has to do with that. So the moon pool is somehow involved."

"You think she's a threat?" Amber inquired.

"No way. You saw the way she looked. She couldn't be," Sarah retorted.

"Wouldn't be the first time we were wrong," Amber muttered, but everyone ignored her, "Maybe we should find her then we know what she wants."

"And how do you suggest we do that? Not like there was a single clue that could help us," Emily objected.

"We do have one," Rachel pointed out and held up her necklace, "This. If it can show us her, then why not the way to her or at least her location?" The girls had to agree with that.

"But how do we get it to tell us? We don't even know what triggered this," Sarah replied.

"I guess for now all we can do is wait," Emily sighed. "I hate waiting," Amber muttered as she scoffed down another piece of cake.

"Hey, I wanted that," Sarah protested.

"Tough luck. First come, first served," Amber mumbled between bites, while Sarah just frowned.

After having talked half the night and cleaning up, Rachel headed home, though she didn't want to. Instead of going inside, Rachel walked around the house and sat down at the edge to the water. She reached down and slowly let her finger glide over the water. Looking at her wet fingers, she felt sad. Even though she hadn't had her powers for almost a year now, she had gotten used to relying on the aid of the necklace. Rachel let her mind wander to the magic that resonated from the necklace and grasped a bit of it. Using it, she made a small water tentacle float in front of her. The same kind of tentacle which was the reason for her now powerless state. Irritated she flung the tentacle away, making a splash. It was strange having to think how to reach the magic when she wanted to use it. Back then she never had to.

The crescent moon that shone down from above eased her mind a bit. She couldn't let herself think like this. For her own sake and everyone else's. Her mind started to wander back to her other problem at hand. Her mother. She had to keep her as far away as possible from Sarah, Emily and Amber. Though her mother didn't have any magic left, she knew her mother would do anything to get back at their mothers. With a sigh Rachel got up and went into the already dark house.

* * *

><p>The next day, or to put it better, that morning, the four met in Emily's bedroom. "Sarah, was Lewis able to shed some light on the situation?" Emily asked.<p>

The brunette, who had told her parents everything in hopes of finding a solution, shook her head, replying, "No. He can't explain it either. According to him, there were no strange or rare celestial occurrences. It was an ordinary night." "

Well something must have been different otherwise that wouldn't have happened," Amber retorted.

"Maybe the moon pool just decided that it wanted to show us that girl," Rachel suggested with a shrug.

"But then why did only your necklace glow and not the whole cave? We can't forget that those stones are from a different moon pool," Emily pointed out, thoughtfully.

"Are you saying that it was Claire trying to contact us?" Amber questioned, her voice shaking slightly at the thought of the spirit that had saved them.

"Why not?" Emily replied.

"Because it's not her," Sarah interrupted them abruptly, making everyone look at her surprised, "Don't ask me how I know, but it's not. It doesn't feel the same. It didn't feel like a warning, nor did she talk to us. No, whoever did this, is not Claire. Besides her spirit no longer exists." Sarah whispered the last sentence with tears in her eyes. Everyone placed a consoling hand on Sarah. They knew Sarah had felt closest to the spirit.

"Then what was it? If we can rule out our moon pool and Claire, who's left?" Emily asked, "Rachel, did the necklace feel any different than usual?"

Rachel thought back to last night. She was about to shake her head, when it hit her. That strange feeling she had felt. "I felt strange for a moment. I didn't think anything of it, but now I realized it," Rachel answered, "For an instance the aura of the necklace intensified by a thousand. That was right before it began glowing."

"Even so, why did it suddenly build up?" Sarah objected.

"I thinkâ€¦ it reacted to your magic," Rachel told them softly. Everyone stared at her in silence.

Finally Amber said, "What? Why would it be reacting to us? We've used our magic plenty of times before and never has anything remotely close like that happened."

"I know that. It's justâ€¦ I can't explain it. It's kind of like how it is with Sarah," Rachel tried to explain.

"Okay, before this turns into an all out war, there is one simple way to test this," Emily interrupted them, "I'll be right back." With that Emily got up, left and returned soon with three glasses of water, which she placed in front of her friends. "We'll use our magic on this water and see if anything happens," Emily told them and activated her power to slowly freeze the water in one glass.

Eagerly all four of them stared at Rachel's necklace, waiting for something to happen. "See, I told you," Amber said when several seconds passed without anything occurring.

"Just be patient. Sarah," Emily retorted and Sarah nodded, using her power to make a column of water raise from another glass. Again they waited to no avail. Finally Amber raised her hand, making the water in the last glass start to boil.

They eyed each other, waiting for something to happen. "I told you noth- What theâ€¦!" Amber exclaimed as suddenly Rachel's necklace once again started to glow. This time however instead of becoming an exploding light, one beam of light came from each stone. They ran across the walls of the room before pointing to one spot on the wall, where a world map hung. Then it disappeared again.

The four girls stared at each other astonished. Slowly they walked over to the map to take a closer look where the beams had pointed. They stared at the map. Partially smirking at Amber, because it had worked, Emily said, "Looks like we're going to..."

****A/N: ****Sorry for the cliffhanger, but I couldn't resist. At this point I want to give credit to GemYin, whose idea it was that Cleo is expecting a child. So a big thanks to her. Also I want to thank H2OGirl1101 for reminding me that Rachel still has some unfinished business with her mother. Lastly I want to thank everyone who has been reading my stories this far.

Who is the girl that the girls saw? Enemy or ally? What is up with Rachel's necklace and where is it sending them? Can Rachel solve her problems? This and much more will be revealed this season. Please review so I know what you think.

2. Ireland

****A/N: ****I'm thrilled that my first chapter already found so many readers. Thanks to all readers and reviewers. This chapter turned out a lot longer than I thought, but I don't think you'll mind, right? Now without further wait, here is chapter 2. Enjoy!**

****nextgeneration123** Now where would the fun be, if I told you. Maybe if you read the chapter you'll find out. ;)

>

****countrybaby** No Bella never met Cleo, Emma and Rikki. I started my story after season 2.
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****_Previously... Sarah, Amber, Emily and Rachel were celebrating their one year anniversary, when they get a vision of a girl. They try to find out who the girl is. Then Rachel's necklace gives them the location of the girl. Meanwhile Rachel thinks her mother knows more than she lets on. Now on to the chapter.
>

Chapter 2: Ireland

Partially smirking at Amber, because it had worked, Emily said, "Looks like we're going to Ireland."

"Rockport, Ireland to be exact," Sarah pointed out, excitedly, "Great, that means we can find that person."

"Sorry to be the one to rain on your parade, but how do you intend to get there? Not like Ireland is around the corner," Rachel objected. Sarah and Emily looked at Rachel, clearly realizing that a destination didn't bring them anything, if they had no means of getting there.

"Rachel's right. Though it would be cool to swim there, it would take ages. Not to mention that we would be exhausted when we get there," Sarah admitted.

"Damn it," Emily grumbled, thoughtfully, "What now?"

Amber, who still wasn't satisfied, looked at her down friends and cursed herself. Getting up, she told them, "Stay here. I'll be right back." The girls stared at the blonde, who slammed the door shut behind her.

They exchanged a weird glance. "Any idea what that was about?" Rachel asked her friends, but they just shook their heads, just as perplexed.

Slightly annoyed Amber stormed out of Emily's house and across the lawn to her own. Stopping in front of her door, Amber took several breaths to calm herself before she entered. After a quick glance, she found the person she was looking for. Her dad. "Hey dad," Amber said in her sweetest daughter voice as she leaned from behind on the chair her dad was sitting in, "What are you up to?"

Zane closed the newspaper he was reading and looked at his daughter. "What do you want, Amber?" he asked dryly.

"I'm hurt," Amber replied, playing the innocent as she sat down in front of him, "Why do you think that I would want anything?"

"Because every time you use that tone, you want something, like a raise of your allowance," Zane retorted, "So what do you want?"

Amber frowned, but then told him, "Okay, you got me. Sarah, Emily, Rachel and I need plane tickets to Ireland."

"Ireland? What do you need tickets to Ireland for?" Zane asked, confused.

"Remember that girl I told you about? The one Rachel, Sarah, Emily and I saw in our vision. We just found out that she lives in Ireland," Amber explained.

"Listen I understand that this is important to you, but don't you think this is a bit extreme? You have no idea what awaits you there? For all you know it could be really dangerous and then you'll be in a strange country without help. I'm sorry, but I won't buy the tickets for you," Zane retorted.

"What? Dad, I'm old enough to take care of myself and I'm with my friends. Not to mention that we're not ordinary girls. We're mermaids," Amber protested, brought up, but then continued more calmly, "Like you said this is important to me, so please. Even if it is dangerous, we can't just ignore what the moon pool showed us. If we did, we would forever live in fear."

Zane stared at his daughter, astonished at the sincere and emotional speech. He rarely ever saw his daughter like this. "Oh for goodness sake, buy her the tickets," Rikki said, coming in from the kitchen, having heard everything.

"Mom," Amber whispered, while both father and daughter stared at her.

Looking at his wife, Zane sighed, "Okay, I can tell when I'm beat. You get your tickets."

Amber jumped up, beaming, "Thank you, daddy." With a hug and a peck on the cheek, Amber danced out of the house again. "

Did you have to butt in?" Zane asked his wife, "I was trying to teacher our daughter that she can't have everything she asks for."

"Oh, please. You were putty in her hands after that speech. You couldn't have turned down anything," Rikki smirked as she walked up to her husband, "Not to mention that you shouldn't meddle in mermaid affairs."

"Okay, I admit it," Zane gave in, "She knows how to get to me, our princess."

"And what am I, if Amber is the princess?" Rikki inquired, playing the hurt victim.

"You are of course the queen," Zane told her and kissed her.

* * *

><p>Meanwhile Amber had made it back to Emily's room. "Okay, we have our flight," she smiled.<p>

"How did you do that?" Emily questioned, perplexed.

"You just need the right connections," Amber smirked.

"Good, then we're off to Ireland," Sarah cheered.

"Actually," Rachel cut in, "I think I should stay here." Her friends stared at her, confused as Rachel continued, "How am I supposed to explain this to my mother? I think it's best if I stay here. I can keep the fort down while you're gone and help with any inquires you might have."

"I guess you're right," Sarah gave in reluctantly, sad that they wouldn't be able to go together.

Silently Rachel added in her thoughts, "I'm sorry, but if I left my

mother would figure something out. Besides I can't be a lot of use anyway. Without any magic."

Amazingly Zane had been able to get three tickets very quickly and only two days later the girls were at the Gold Coast Airport, ready to face whatever fate, or possibly the moon pool, had in store for them in Ireland. They had said good bye to their families and Rachel, who they promised to keep updated. "You guys realize something?" Sarah asked as they stood in the entrance hall of the airport.

"You mean that we met here for the first time a year ago?" Amber smiled, facing her friends.

"So much has happened," Emily replied, but then looked at a clock, which hung over the entrance, "We should get going. We don't want to miss our flight."

After having passed security and hanging out in a lounge, the three mermaids boarded the plane, which soon took off. Thanks to Zane's frequent flyer miles they had even been able to fly business class. "This is so cool," Sarah mused, "I never flew before and now I get to fly business class."

"You never flew before? I've flown so many times, I can't count them all. A lot of times business class in fact," Amber replied, surprised.

"Not everyone has flown as much as you, Amber. I mean a flew a couple of times, but never business, only economy," Emily pointed out.

With the little debate on flight travel over the girls began to occupy themselves. Emily read a book, while Amber first watched the in-flight movie, but then listened to music and Sarah read a magazine. At one point Sarah put down the magazine and asked the question that had been on her mind since they had gotten on the plane, "Say Emily, why don't you tell your brother what you are?" Surprised Emily looked up from her book, while Amber pulled her headset from her ears to listen in. "I mean, your parents know and your brother is old enough to handle the responsibility of not telling anyone. Not to mention you wouldn't have to be on guard in your own house," Sarah pointed out.

Sighing Emily closed her book and explained, "I know that, it's just really different from telling mom and dad. They already knew of mermaids. Telling them didn't change their view on the world. If I told my brother, his entire world would be turned upside down. Suddenly mythical creatures, mermaids, exist." Though nobody was listening in on them, Emily said the last few words very carefully.

"Why do you ask? Is it because of your little sibling?" Amber inquired.

Sarah nodded, softly, answering, "It's just, up until now everyone in my family knew what I am. When my little brother or sister comes, how should we handle it? I mean during the first few years it'll be irrelevant, but thenâ€¦ Would it be better to tell him or her or to keep it a secret? To make him understand why his big sister can't go swimming with him and such."

"I can't answer that question for you. It's your secret to share. You must decide on your own, but take my advice. Wait until he or she is old enough and then see what happens," Emily retorted and Sarah nodded, understandingly.

Like that the 20 hour flight passed with the girls sleeping or keeping themselves busy. Finally they arrived in Ireland. After they collected their luggage, the girls walked into the lobby, where they came to an abrupt halt. Outside the rain was coming down hard. There was no way they could get out without turning into a mermaid, never mind hailing a cab. "Right, the weather is said not to be the best around here," Emily muttered, "Anyone got any ideas?"

"Wait until it stops?" Sarah suggested with a shrug.

Amber turned to a worker of the airport and asked, "Excuse me, do you know when the rain will let up?"

"In 1 or 2 maybe," he replied.

"Minutes?" Amber inquired, which only made the worker laugh, "Hours, but only if you're lucky."

With that Amber turned back to her friends and whispered, "I think this calls for some magic." Sarah nodded, quickly glancing around to make sure that no one was watching her and then activated her magic. Moving her hand, she willed the clouds to stop giving off rain and to do so for a few minutes.

With her handy work done, she ushered, "We have to hurry. This won't last for very long." Quickly the girls took their suitcases and found a cab.

After a half a hour drive they arrived in the small, seaside town Rockport. It looked very peaceful as they drove along the promenade to their hotel, the only hotel in the area to be exact. Up in their room, the girls unpacked. "So this is Rockport," Amber mumbled, thoughtfully, looking out the window.

"I like it," Sarah said, "It's so different from the Gold Coast. So peaceful."

"So should we go looking for that girl? I mean we only have a few days here, but I'm pretty tired," Emily asked.

"It's pretty early. We could sleep till noon or so and then go," Sarah suggested and the others agreed.

After their short nap the girls got ready to go out. "You know I just realized something," Amber said, observing the few tourists that walked about below the window.

"What?" the other two asked.

"Even if we are now Ireland, how do we find her? I mean we have no idea where this girl could be."

The other two froze. Amber was right. "You know I realized that we haven't called Rachel yet. Lets do that first," Sarah suggested and the blondes nodded.

The girls got out a phone and dialed Rachel's number. "Hey Rachel," the girls chorused on loudspeaker when their friend picked up.

"Hey guys," Rachel replied, "I take it you arrived safely in Rockport."

"You got it," Sarah said.

"So do you have any leads on where to find her?" Rachel asked, leaning back in her chair in her room.

"That's the problem. We have no clue where to start," Emily answered.

"Not that this place is that big," Amber cut in.

"Any suggestions?" Sarah questioned.

"Hm, not really, sorry," Rachel mumbled, thoughtfully, toying with her necklace, "Since Rockport isn't really big, I guess you could just go searching for her in hope of finding her."

"Seems like the only choice we have," Emily sighed.

"Don't worry. You'll find her for sure," Rachel assured her friends, "After all you are mermaids." Just then her mother came into her room. Rachel stared, praying that her mother hadn't heard the last comment. They seemed to be having a staring contest of sorts.

"Hello? Rachel you still there?" Emily's voice came out of the phone, causing the mother-daughter stare off to be interrupted. Charlotte made no notion of leaving and sat down on Rachel's bed. Rachel knew she couldn't have her mother eavesdropping on her conversation, if you could call it that, since Charlotte obviously wasn't even pretending to not listen in, nor could she send her mother out, without making herself suspicious, at least not anymore than she already was.

"Sorry guys," Rachel finally said, turning back to her phone, "I have to go."

"Is everything alright?" Sarah asked, hearing the strain in her friend's voice.

"Everything is fine. I'll talk to you later. Good luck. Bye," Rachel replied, quickly and hung up before her friends could even say good bye.

Putting her phone down, Rachel turned to her mother. "Can I help you?" Rachel asked, not making it a secret that she was not amused about her mother's behavior and crossed her arms in front of her chest.

"Was that your friends? Where are they that you have to call them?" Charlotte asked, a seemingly harmless question.

"If you must know, they are in Ireland," Rachel replied.

"Ireland? What are they doing there?" Charlotte inquired.

"Visiting a friend," the daughter retorted, her temper flaring up. Rachel could tell that she was close to losing it.

"And they didn't take you along?" Charlotte questioned innocently.

That did it for Rachel. "Because I don't know the friend," she snapped, but then realized what was happening to her and took a deep breath to calm herself, "Was there a reason you came in here?"

"I wanted to know if you are going to join me for dinner," Charlotte told her, completely ignoring her daughter's outburst.

"Sorry, I already ate," Rachel answered, curtly, "Now that you know that you can leave."

"Actually can I see your necklace for a moment?" the mother questioned, eying the necklace around her daughter's neck. It took all of Rachel's control to stay impartial and not protectively grab the necklace and yell at her mother to never go near it. Instead an icy minute passed before her shaking hands went to the clasp of her necklace and undid it. The overbearing presence of the magic stones immediately lessened to a feeling in her hand, like when you hold a warm object in it. Rachel held the necklace out to her mother. When Charlotte took it, the presence almost instantly vanished from her mind and it was almost a relief to not feel it for once. Charlotte stared at the necklace now in her hand. Once again Rachel caught herself wondering how much her mother really knew. Did she feel the presence too? If she did, Rachel saw no sign of it in her mother's face.

Finally Charlotte said, "They're very pretty. What kind of rocks are these? I never did ask." Rachel shrugged as her mother handed back the necklace. She suspected her mother recognized the moon pool rocks, if not at least it seemed familiar to her.

"Well then good night, Rachel," Charlotte said as she got up and left. With a sigh Rachel dropped onto her bed. She couldn't believe she had lost her temper. She rarely did and usually she regretted it afterwards. Even now Rachel regretted it, even though her mother deserved the rage directed at her. Rachel held up her necklace, staring at the three rocks. Hopefully Sarah, Amber and Emily had more luck than she did.

* * *

><p>Meanwhile the three mermaids wandered through the streets of Rockport. Each of them had donned a rain jacket and had an umbrella in hand, in case of another downpour. After Rachel's abrupt end to their call, they had decided they could do little else than hope that fate made them stumble across that girl's path.<p>

So far they had walked through all the streets of Rockport and along the promenade. Also they had stopped in several shops. A few times they thought they saw the girl, but each time they had been mistaken.

Frustrated Amber let herself drop into the sand with a groan. It was

already late afternoon. "We've been everywhere in this town and nothing," Amber muttered, "What if she's on vacation or indoors all day?"

"We can't think like that," Sarah chided, looking out at the ocean, "We will find her. The moon pool wouldn't send us here without a reason."

"We still have tomorrow to search for her. We have to make the best of that day," Emily told them and they nodded.

Just then Sarah felt something on her rain jacket. Looking at it, she saw a raindrop. "We have to get out off here," Sarah said, "It's starting to rain."

"But where to? The hotel is too far away," Amber objected.

"Look over there. A caf  . We can stay there until the rain stops," Emily suggested, pointing to a shop on the promenade not far from them. Quickly the girls hurried to it and luckily just as they arrived it started to pour.

"I am really starting to hate this place," Amber muttered, looking out at the rain, "Isn't there a day that it doesn't rain?" Emily nearly began a lecture of weather in this region and the different factors which influenced this, but decided against it in the last second. No need to agitate her friend more than she already was.

"Welcome to Rockport Caf  . What can I get you?" someone suddenly asked the girls from behind them.

"Nothing thank you. We're just taking shelter from the  ," Sarah began, but the words ebbed in her throat, when she turned around to look at the waitress. Emily turned to see why her friend had stopped talking and her mouth, like Sarah's, fell open. Amber still stared at the pouring rain, when she felt someone tug on her sleeve.

"What  ," Amber started annoyed, but then she also stared, wide eyed and mouth ajar. There standing before them stood the girl from their vision.

The waitress shrank back a little under the stares of the three girls. "Is something the matter?" she asked, timidly, "Is something on my face?"

"We need to talk to you," Amber finally said.

"Ah, sure. What about?" the waitress questioned.

"What do you know about mermaids?" Sarah inquired and the girl's eyes widened noticeably.

"I'm sorry. I can't help you with that," the waitress replied, taking a step backwards, "Excuse me. I have other customers to take care of. If you wish take a seat somewhere." With that the waitress ran back into the crowded caf  .

Amber was about to run after her, but her friends held her back. "Now

is not the time," Emily told her, softly.

"But she knows something," Amber objected.

"And she'll still know it when her shift is over. We'll wait for her until then," Sarah said, firmly and Amber reluctantly nodded.

"Looks like it stopped raining. We shouldn't alarm her more than we already did. Lets wait outside somewhere," Emily suggested and the others agreed.

Walking back across the street to the beach, the girls made sure to steer clear of any puddles. Suddenly a girl ran past them, bumping into Sarah while doing so. Luckily Emily was able to catch Sarah before she fell into a puddle. "Hey! Get back here and apologize!" Amber called after the blonde, but she just kept running.

"Leave her. It must be important, if she's in such a hurry. Besides nothing happened," Sarah replied, laying a calming on her friend.

"She was still rude," Amber grumbled, but walked on anyway.

After Amber had dried a bench, they sat down and waited. It seemed like they waited for hours, but in reality it was probably only one or two. They busied themselves with various topics of conversation, but at some point they just went quiet and waited.

They were ready to go back to the hotel, when Emily spied the girl coming out of the caf  . "She's done," Emily told her friends while elbowing Amber carefully into the ribs, since she had been close to falling asleep. The girls watched as the waitress, nervously looking around, walked towards the beach. She didn't seem them. Quietly the three mermaids followed her, waiting for a good moment to make their presence known. At last they were far enough from the town and any humans to approach her.

"Excuse me," Emily finally said, causing the waitress to whip around, her eyes widening when she saw the three again.

"Youâ€," she stammered, "What do you want from me?"

"We already told you what we want," Amber reminded her, "We want to know what you know about mermaids."

"I already told you that I don't know anything," the waitress protested, taking a step back.

"We know that that's not true," Sarah retorted, calmly.

"Listen no matter how many times you ask, I don't know anything," the waitress told them, though it was more a weak protest than anything else.

"You sure about that?" Amber asked in a threatening voice.

"Don't even think about it, Amber. We're not hurting anyone," Emily reprimanded her friend.

Suddenly Sarah exclaimed, "Emily watch out!" Unknowingly the

quartette had moved closer to the water and a wave was coming towards Emily, who was closest to the water. Without thinking Emily used her magic to freeze the wave in its tracks, shortly before it hit her knees. The waitress stared at wave and then at the three girls, who had taken several steps away from the water.

"What are you?" she asked, stammering.

The mermaids looked at each other and nodded in a silent agreement. "You'll probably not believe this, but we're mermaids," Sarah confessed.

The waitress' eyes scanned them from head to toe before she whispered, "You're mermaids?" The three nodded. Finally she continued, "This is not the place for this. See that cliff over there out by the ocean? If you are really mermaids, you'll find me. We'll meet there." She pointed into the direction of a cliff in the distance before she walked off, leaving the three mermaids behind.

Amber, Sarah and Emily stared at each other, perplexed. "What was that?" Amber asked.

"I have no idea, but I guess we should go to that cliff," Sarah replied with a shrug.

"But where? She didn't exactly give us much to go on," Emily pointed out. They stood there for a moment.

"It's-It's a moon pool," Sarah suddenly stammered, making her friends look at her.

"What?" the blondes questioned.

"Over there in the direction that the girl pointed, I can feel a moon pool. Or at least a very similar presence to Claire's and our moon pool," Sarah explained, "Can't you feel it?" Looking hard to the cliff, the blondes had to agree with Sarah.

"Then lets see if you're right," Amber said and they dove into the water. They quickly arrived at the cliff's side and found a opening to go under it. Surfacing they gasped. They were in a cave that had the same blue walls as their own moon pool and of course a pool of water. To one side the cave wall was gone, giving view to a beautiful ocean scenery. "This place is amazing," Sarah gasped. The other two could only nod.

"You think we're right? She doesn't seem to be here," Emily asked, doubtfully.

"She has to come. I can't imagine what else she could have meant," Amber objected.

"Don't worry. You're correct here," the voice of the waitress rang through the cave, making the mermaids turn to the entrance of the cave on land, "You really are mermaids." She smiled with relief.

"And what are you? How do you know of this place?" Amber demanded.

"It called me to it," the waitress explained and dove into the moon pool. The girls stared at the spot where she had disappeared. When she resurfaced, Emily's, Sarah's and Amber's jaw nearly dropped to the bottom of the pool. In front of them was the waitress now in the same signature bronze bikini top and fin made of scales as their own.

"You're a mermaid," Sarah muttered and the girl nodded.

"I'm sorry, if I was unfriendly earlier, but I'm sure you understand why," the waitress told them and the others nodded, "I'm Taylor, by the way."

"I'm Emily. This is Amber and Sarah," Emily introduced them, pointing to her friends respectively when she said their name.

"How did you know I was a mermaid?" Taylor asked, "No one has figured it yet."

"Actually we didn't know," Amber spoke up, "A few days ago our moon pool in Australia showed us a vision of you and shortly after that where you were. We decided to come looking for you."

"So you came looking for me, half way around the world, though you have no reason why. You didn't even know if I was home," Taylor pointed out and the others nodded.

"That about sums it up," Emily replied, "That doesn't sound any smarter now than it did before we came, even though we now found you."

"May I ask, what powers do you have? I mean you froze the water," Taylor asked.

"Sure. Well, like you said I can freeze water and create snow and such," Emily began and Sarah continued, "I have the ability to control water and the wind."

"And I can boil water and create lightning and fire," Amber ended, "So which power do you have?"

"None," Taylor replied.

"What do you mean none? Everyone has one," Emily asked. "I mean that I have none of those. Let me show you."

Taylor stretched her hand out, her hand wide open as if she was holding a huge doorknob. With her palm upward she did a turning motion and the water in front of them in a small hole turned into gelatin. Emily leaned forward to stare at it and poke it. "Gelatin," she muttered and Taylor nodded.

Now it turned back to water. "I can turn water into gelatin, but it will turn back to water after a while or I can make it permanently solid," Taylor explained.

"Amazing. So different moon pools grant different powers," Sarah said.

"So how long have you been mermaids?" Taylor inquired, curiously.

"For a bit more than a year," Emily answered, "What about you?"

Meekly Taylor answered, a bit embarrassed, "For about 10 years."

"Ten years!" the three mermaids exclaimed. They had thought that their year as a mermaid had been an eternity, but Taylor's ten years made their time disappear in comparison.

"So you've been a mermaid alone for 10 years now?" Amber questioned.

"Yes. Back when I was 7 I went for a walk in the fields above the cliff here. Suddenly I felt something calling me. It didn't really call, but it was a force that pulled me to a hole in the cliff. The hole leads to the entrance that I entered through before. I felt so at home here for some reason. I played in this cave for hours and didn't realize that it had become night. All of the sudden the moon pool began to glow as the full moon appeared overhead. As you know it turned me into a mermaid. Since then I've been keeping it a secret," Taylor told them.

"And no one ever found out?" Sarah asked to which Taylor shook her head.

They talked for a long time about their different stories. Sarah, Amber and Emily told of their mothers, Rachel and the two close battles that they had. Taylor preferred to listen, but told a bit of her life as a lone mermaid and how she had fooled everyone into believing that she was still normal.

At last the sun had fallen and darkness had set on Rockport. "You should go back to your hotel now. It's going to start raining soon," Taylor told them.

"How do you know that?" Emily asked, looking at the cloudy sky, which looked no different than the other times she had seen it.

"You could say that living in Ireland as a mermaid you either learn to feel the change in the weather or you're exposed," Taylor told them, "I guess it's like when people say a body part hurts when it becomes cold or something, but in my case I just feel it."

"Amazing," Sarah whispered.

"How do you do it? I mean with so much rain, it doesn't seem like you can go anywhere," Amber questioned.

"You should see my attendance record. It's pretty bad, because of the rain here, but if it's an important day, like when there's a test, I go in full rain gear. Though that sometimes doesn't mean I make it there dry," Taylor said.

"Don't your parents wonder why you have so many skipped classes?" Emily inquired.

Taylor paused for a second, looking out at the ocean before answering, "They don't seem to mind. As long as my grades are good, which they are, and I don't collect too many of them, they don't say anything."

"Lucky you," Amber muttered.

"Anyway you should get going. The rain is nearly here," Taylor told them, going back to their original subject.

"What about you?" Sarah asked.

"I live nearby, so you don't have to worry," Taylor assured them. With a goodbye the three friends swam away, leaving Taylor behind. "They're really interesting," she whispered.

Just as Taylor had predicted it soon started to rain, but luckily Sarah, Emily and Amber had made it back to the hotel in time. "That was close," Amber muttered, looking out the window at the rain, "She really can feel the rain."

"Well if you lived here you would feel the need to feel rain coming too. We should consider ourselves lucky that we live in Australia," Sarah said, joining her friend at the window.

"Taylor made a valid point," Emily mumbled, making her friends look their friend, who was laying on her bed, "The moon pool send us here, but why? Just to meet her? There has to be more."

"Even if you say that it doesn't seem like there's a conspiracy here. Taylor seems really nice," Amber pointed out, "We should be glad that we don't have to face a crazed person, or a mermaid hunter perhaps."

"I know, but where is the logic in it all?" Emily questioned.

"We're mermaids. Tell me what part of that is logical?" Amber retorted.

"Stop it, you guys," Sarah intercepted them, "What if we invite Taylor to come to Australia with us? I mean she does have vacation like us right now."

"That's a great idea. We can ask her tomorrow," Emily smiled. Tired from their long, but successful day the girls were soon asleep.

The next day the three made their way to the address that Taylor had given them. They soon stood at a fenced in family house. It had a beautiful garden around it. Like Taylor had said it was on the outskirts of Rockport and thus very close to the moon pool. They walked up to the door and rang the bell. A moment later an older woman, who had a similarity to Taylor. The woman eyed the trio before asking, "Yes, what can I do for you?"

"We're friends of Taylor's. Is she home?" Emily told her.

"Taylor, you have visitors!" the woman called over her shoulder and then turned back to the girls, "I'm Taylor's mom. It's a pleasure to meet you."

Just then Taylor came downstairs. Seeing her fellow mermaids, she smiled. "Mom, these are my friends Amber, Emily and Sarah," she introduced them, "You guys this is my mother, Bella. Come in." Taylor led the three upstairs into her bedroom. It was a pretty plain room with the typical furniture like a bed, desk, etc. Sarah smiled, looking out the window. From there she could see the cliff, where the moon pool was situated.

Once everyone was settled Taylor asked, "So what do I owe the pleasure to?"

"As you know we're going to be flying back to Australia tomorrow morning," Emily began, not sure how to ask the question as Taylor just nodded.

"What we're trying to ask, if you would want to come with us," Sarah continued, "To Australia."

Taylor stared at them. Taylor rung for words for a moment before whispering, "I'm sorry. I have to decline." She looked to the side.

"Why?" Amber demanded to know.

"It's just that I don't think my parents can afford it. Plus I still have my shifts at the café and homework that I still need to do," Taylor explained.

The three mermaids looked at her, a bit disappointed. "That's okay, I guess," Emily said, "Will we meet again tonight and at least say good bye to one another?"

"No, sorry. I have another shift," Taylor muttered, her head low, "I hope that you found what you were looking for and that you have a good flight. Call me when you are back." The trio took it as their sign to leave and gave Taylor a quick goodbye. Opening the door, they ran into Bella, who had a tray of cookies and juice. The girls walked past her and Bella just stared after them.

Bella walked up to her daughter, placing the tray on the table. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to eavesdrop," she said, "Why don't you go with them? I know we're not rich, but our financial situation is that bad. If you want, you can go. Besides even the manager said that you have been taking so many shifts, that you could take vacation for a while."

Bella moved over to Taylor, but Taylor shot up and walked to the door. "I'm going out," Taylor mumbled and walked out.

* * *

><p>The next day Sarah, Emily and Amber had taken a taxi to the airport. "So you think that we found what we were looking for?" Sarah questioned, thoughtfully. What Taylor had said hadn't left her head.<p>

"I don't know," Emily muttered.

"And we never will," Amber muttered, still annoyed at Taylor, "Unless

the moon pool starts to talk. Come on. It's no use crying over spilled milk. We'll only miss our plane."

They started to head for the check in counter when someone exclaimed, "Wait you guys!" Turning around, they were faced with a red faced and out of breath Taylor.

"Taylor? What are you doing here?" Sarah asked, confused as much as the other two.

"I want to apologize for yesterday. I was out of line," Taylor replied.

"Is that all?" Amber asked, her voice still slightly icy.

"No. I've decided to go to Australia with you. Not on this flight, but I will follow you in a day or two," Taylor told them.

"That's great," Emily smiled, "Are you sure about this?"

"As sure as I will ever be," Taylor assured her, though it still sounded a bit unsure, "You should get going though. You'll miss your flight."

After a group hug and a pleasant farewell, Taylor waved as Emily, Sarah and Amber disappeared behind the security. Taylor's smile immediately vanished. "I really hope this was the right decision," she whispered as she turned back to leave. As expected it was raining. Was this a bad omen?

****A/N: ****The girls have found Taylor, but does that mean everything is smooth sailing from now on? Why did Taylor suddenly change her mind? How will Rachel react to meeting Taylor? Is the rain really a bad omen? Please review.

3. Oh Brother

****A/N:** Sadly school started again, but I'll try to update as much as possible. Thanks to all those who read and reviewed. Here is chapter 3. Enjoy!
>

****nextgeneration123** that is an interesting idea. What would these powers entail?
>

******_Previously...** The three mermaids to to Ireland to find the girl from their vision. They find her, discovering that she has a different power, and ask her to come to Australia. In the beginning she declines, but then changes her mind. Meanwhile Rachel tries to keep her suspicious mother at bay. Now on to the chapter.

>

Chapter 3: Oh Brother

"Come on, tell me more about the girl from our vision," Rachel pleaded, playfully, as she sat down in Emily's kitchen, "I mean the girl is coming today and you haven't told me anything besides the

fact that she works at a café." The three mermaids exchanged a smile. They hadn't intentionally not told Rachel anything. Having only returned two days prior, they had had little time to do anything. They had told their parents the news and they were just as thrilled as their daughters.

"Her name is Taylor Benjamin and she's really nice," Sarah began.

"That's all? You invite her just because of that?" Rachel questioned, not buying it.

"And she's a mermaid," Emily ended, "She has the power to turn water into jelly." Those words hit Rachel like an avalanche. That girl was a mermaid. Her insides twisted a bit and an uneasy feeling flooded her. The three mermaids eyed their friend for a reaction.

Finally Rachel took all her acting skills, put on a fake smile and lied, "That's great. I can't wait to meet her. Where will she be staying?" Rachel couldn't tell them how she really felt, not with them smiling like that.

"Since Cleo's pretty late in her pregnancy we thought we shouldn't bother her too much and Amber's dad had the guest bedroom turned into a makeshift office, Taylor will stay with me," Emily explained.

"What about your brother?" Rachel asked.

"We're introducing Taylor as a distant relative on Emily's mother's side, so there shouldn't be a problem," Amber answered.

"And how did he take the news?" Rachel inquired.

"Pretty normal for the fact that some distant relative he never heard of is suddenly taking over the house," Emily told her, "Not like we told him she's a mermaid."

"We still have some time before Taylor arrives so maybe we should go see Ryan and the others. They weren't exactly please that we blew them off by going to Ireland," Sarah suggested. The others agreed and left.

* * *

><p>Taylor stared out of the window of the plane. Before her stretched the Gold Coast airport with the glistening down on the runway, not a cloud in sight. The flight had been long and she was exhausted, but at the same time she was excited. She was really here. What also pleased her was the fact that she felt not the slightest hint of rain in the area. It was almost weird. "It's going to take a bit to get used to this," she thought as she finally got up from her seat to follow the string of people exiting the aircraft.<p>

After having gone through security, Taylor looked around for the right conveyer belt. As always the time it had taken to get through security was long and the luggage from her flight was already doing turns around the track. Plenty of the bags had already reunited with their owners and so Taylor thought she would quickly get her bag and meet Sarah, Emily and Amber. However her suitcase didn't show in any

of the several rounds that Taylor had watched.

With a slight uneasy feeling Taylor's eyes wondered to the screen. As she feared the unloading had been completed. With a sigh Taylor walked over to a counter where two friendly employees greeted her. "Excuse me, it seems my suitcase isn't here," Taylor told them and handed them her travel papers.

One of the workers turned to a computer and began typing rapidly. "I'm sorry to say that your luggage does not appear to have made the trip," the worker replied, sincerely.

"What? Where is it?" Taylor questioned, brought up.

"I'm sorry, miss, but I'm not sure. If you leave us your address and number we'll call you once it has arrived." Taylor took several deep breaths to fight back the panic that was rising inside her. She didn't even know Emily's, or any of the mermaids addresses, for that matter. That was all in her suitcase.

With a sigh Taylor gave them her number and made her way through customs to lobby, where she would find the mermaid trio waiting for. Or so she hoped, but when she walked out into the lobby she saw many people, but not the three mermaids. Desperately she whipped her head around, dangerously close to getting a whiplash, but no matter how many times she turned, she didn't find them.

"Why aren't they here?" Taylor wondered, "I'm not early? Maybe their bus is late or something?" Then her gaze fell on a clock on the wall. It said 12, but Taylor clearly remembered telling the three mermaids that her plane would land at 4. Realization hit her hard. She had miscalculated her flight and given Emily the wrong arrival time. They thought she wasn't due for another 4 hours.

Luckily Taylor, like every other teenager nowadays, owned a cell phone and in it she had Emily's number. Quickly she got it out, but no matter how much she tried, the screen stayed black. It was out of battery. This really wasn't her day. She cursed the person whose idea it was to have a MP3 player and cell phone in one and herself for listening to music during the whole flight. She could look them up in a phonebook, but she didn't know their last names or they were lost in the mist of panic for the moment.

With a sigh Taylor sunk down onto a bench. "I guess this means waiting," she muttered, resting her forehead in her palms, her elbows on her knees.

The clicking of a camera made her look up. A guy with blond hair and blue eyes was the cameramen. He seemed slightly older than her, probably in college. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to startle you. It's just it's a beautiful picture," he explained, slightly babbling.

"It's alright. You didn't startle me," Taylor replied, waving off his attempts of an apology, "Though I can't see how it could possibly be a good picture." He sat down next to her and showed the picture to her on the small display on the camera, which was a pretty expensive one from what Taylor could tell. Looking at the display, she had to admit he was right. The sun shining down on her hair, which is cascading down her back, gave off a sad, yet beautiful aura. "Okay, I admit you

were right. It's really beautiful."

"Thank you," he smiled, "If I'm not being too blunt, can I ask why you are so sad?"

"I gave my friends the wrong time and I have means to contact them, so I guess I'm stuck here until 4," Taylor told him, "Not to mention my suitcase is somewhere in the world."

"Well, I can't help with either of those things, but I can offer you a drink at the caf  over there," he offered, getting up and reaching his hand out to her.

Taylor looked at the hand, contemplating whether or not she should accept. She normally was pretty shy around guys, but this guy was different from any of the boys she met before. Still she didn't know what to do. "I don't know ," she began, softly, but the guy interrupted, "Please. I promise I won't bite."

With a laugh Taylor took his hand, replying, "Well if that's the case, I guess I have nothing to fear. I'm Taylor from Ireland, by the way."

"James. From the Gold Coast, believe it or not," he introduced himself as he led her through the crowded lobby.

After they had sat down in a booth in the caf  with their drinks, Taylor asked, "So James from the Gold Coast, why are you at the airport? It doesn't seem like you were waiting for someone."

"I was taking some pictures of different of the airport, mostly of people," James answered.

"So you're a photographer," Taylor concluded.

"No, photography is just a hobby. I study at the college in the Gold Coast," James explained, "And what about you, Taylor from Ireland? Why make the long trip?"

"I'm here to visit some friends," Taylor replied. She knew Emily and the others are planning on introducing her as a relative, but with James it didn't matter what she told him.

* * *

><p>"Hey guys!" the girls called as they walked up to them on the beach in front of Lewis' old beach house, waving. Emily and Sarah gave Daniel and Ryan a kiss, but when Amber tried Jordan dodged it.<p>

"What? Are you still mad?" she asked.

"You blew off our date to fly to Ireland," Jordan retorted.

"Oh come on. It was important," Amber protested.

"Mermaid things are always more important than us," Jordan snapped.

"Don't be like that. You know it paid off," Daniel said, but Jordan

stormed off towards the water, ignoring him.

Amber simply looked after him. "You should go after him," Sarah told her.

"Why? I did nothing wrong," Amber objected.

"Geez, you two can be such kids at times," Emily muttered, "Come on, Amber. Jordan is just unhappy that he couldn't spend time with you. That can't be a crime." Amber grumbled something under her breath, but walked over to Jordan anyway.

"Jordanâ€¦," she began as she stepped behind him, but he interrupted, "I'm not some puppy dog like Daniel or Ryan, who doesn't care if he's set up."

"Listen, I'm sorry, but it really was important," Amber replied, "Is there anyway I can make it up to you, besides of course going on a make-up date?"

Jordan smiled, devilishly, "There is." Suddenly he grabbed Amber by the wrist and pulled her forward, so that she stumbled forward into the water.

True to herself, 10 seconds later Amber transformed into a mermaid. "I'll get you for this," Amber growled, glaring at him.

If looks could kill, but Jordan just ignored it and walked off, saying, "I'd like to see you try."

"Just you wait," Amber muttered as she slowly pulled herself out of the water, so that she could dry herself.

Rachel had stepped off to the side. Sadly Alex's exchange had come to an end some time ago and he had gone back to their hometown. Of course they stayed in contact and talked at least every second day on the phone. So now she watched as Amber chased Jordan along the beach as the others watched with a smile on their faces. A small smile also tweaked at Rachel's lips, but the notion of the Irish mermaid quickly diminished it.

Finally Amber had calmed down and had returned to the group. "So the new mermaid is coming soon?" Daniel asked.

"Yeah, she's arriving at 4. We should start heading over there at some point," Emily answered.

"So you're ditching us again?" Jordan pointed out, jokingly.

"Don't you dare start again," Amber shot at him, still slightly mad.

"Anyway, you are aware that there is a full moon tonight, right?" Ryan asked, trying to get back on subject, "Was it really a smart idea of her to travel today?"

"We know, but Taylor said it was fine. We already have everything ready for tonight. Besides we'll definitely be inside by the time the full moon rises," Sarah assured them.

"She isn't afraid of the full moon?" Daniel questioned, curiously.

"What's the worst that could happen with her powers? She turns all the water in the radius of one mile into jelly?" Jordan joked.

"We'll see how funny you find it when it really happens," Rachel retorted.

"I guess we should head to the airport slowly," Emily told them, checking her watch. The girls gave their boyfriends a kiss before departing.

* * *

><p>Meanwhile Taylor and James had gone back to the airport after they had gone to the cafÃ© and later the park. "Thank you for an enjoyable day, but I don't want to take up anymore of your time," Taylor told him.<p>

"It was my pleasure. I'm glad I was able to make your first few hours in the Gold Coast fun," James smiled, "I hope I can see you again."

"Yeah, that would be nice," Taylor replied.

"Here, type in your number," James said as he handed her his phone.

After Taylor had entered her number, she answered, "I would want to have yours, but my batteries are dead." He took her phone from her hand and examined it. With smirk he popped open the lid of her cell phone, replacing the battery with his own. Seconds later her phone sprang to life.

"Here you go," James said, handing back her phone after having typed in his number, "You can give me that back, when we meet again."

"You just want to make sure that we meet again," Taylor accused.

"Maybe," James smirked as he turned, "See you soon, Taylor from Ireland."

With that he left. Taylor only stared after him and whispered, "Until we meet again, James from the Gold Coast." Taylor sat down and waited for the mermaids to show.

"Taylor!" a call made her look up to see four girls coming up to her, the stranger staying behind. The three mermaids gave their friend a hug. "What are you doing here already?" Emily asked, looking at your watch, "You shouldn't land for a while."

"Long story short, I accidentally gave you the wrong time, have been here since 12, my phone was dead, luckily it's charged now and my suitcase is m.i.a," Taylor recapped quickly, making the girls stare.

"Anyway this is the friend we told you about, Rachel," Sarah said and

gestured towards Rachel, "Rachel this is Taylor."

Rachel stepped forward, eying Taylor. Unwillingly she felt jealousy come up inside her. So this was the girl that was replacing her. A real mermaid with a cool power and not some human, whose only way to be extraordinary was through a necklace, which had it's magic from the other three. How could she ever compete with that?

Taylor reached her hand out, smiling, "It's a pleasure to meet you, Rachel. I've heard quite a bit about you."

Reluctantly Rachel took the hand, replying, "Me too."

"Then I guess we should head home. The sooner we're off the streets, the better I feel about the full moon," Emily said.

Taylor looked at them confused. "You mean to say that you're effected by the full moon?" she asked.

"You mean to say you aren't?" Amber retorted, making Taylor shake her head.

"I haven't been effected by the moon for quite a few years," Taylor explained.

"That's amazing," the three mermaids gasped as Rachel only thought, "Of course, she's not effected by the moon. She's too perfect for that."

The girls had walked a bit from the airport, talking animatedly, when they heard someone call, "Rachel!" They turned to see Charlotte running up to them. Inside Rachel's whole domineer became one of contempt, but outside she just smiled. "What are you doing here? Who is this?" Charlotte asked, eying the stranger.

"This is Taylor, mom. She is Emily's relative," Rachel explained, "We just picked her up from the airport."

"Oh, the one from Ireland, right?" Charlotte replied, a slight tone in her voice, "A pleasure."

"Same," Taylor smiled.

"Don't you have somewhere to be, mom?" Rachel asked, slightly hinting in an undertone.

"Right," Charlotte answered, "Good bye."

The girls watched Charlotte leave as an awkward silence spread out. Suddenly a cell phone rang, making each girl whip out their phone. It was Taylor's. "Helloâ€| Really? You found my suitcase already. That's greatâ€| No, I'll get it myselfâ€| Thank you," Taylor said and then hung up, "They found my suitcase and it's at the airport."

"That's great, but the moon is rising soon," Emily replied.

"You can go home. I can go get it myself," Taylor assured them.

"But will you find the way?" Sarah asked, "Rachel, can't you go with Taylor?"

"Ah, sure," Rachel answered, slightly uncomfortable.

"Okay, then we'll meet you at my house," Emily said as the three mermaids walked off towards one direction, while Rachel and Taylor went to the other.

A while later they were back here with Taylor's suitcase. The two walked beside each other in silence. Finally Taylor broke it by stating, "I don't intend on replacing you. From what Sarah, Amber and Emily told me, I can tell they care about you greatly."

Rachel abruptly stopped, looking at the mermaid. "Was I being that obvious? I'm sorry. Please I don't meanâ€¦," Rachel began, but Taylor interrupted her, "You weren't. I just have very acute senses." "You must think I'm completely crazy for being so freaked out," Rachel assumed.

"Not at all. Though I obviously can't say I was in your position before, I understand what it means to be replaced," Taylor told her, "As a mermaid you give up a lot."

Rachel nodded, whispering, "I know."

Again silence came back, but it was once more interrupted by Taylor asking, "Can I ask a question?"

"You already did," Rachel smirked, making them laugh.

"Why does your mom hate Sarah and the rest, or does she not even know that they're mermaids?" Taylor asked, causing Rachel to abruptly stop laughing, "Sorry. It's just I saw how you acted. The others don't know."

"A long story short, my mom was once a mermaid along with the previous mermaids, but it got to her head and she was forced to lose her powers. Obviously she isn't so happy about my friend choices nor does she know that they are mermaids," Rachel explained, softly.

"That's why there's tension between you," Taylor concluded and Rachel nodded, "Please don't let it get between you."

For some reason it snapped Rachel. "What do you know about torn families? You have a perfect life. I can't tell my mother anything without fearing what could happen!" Rachel snapped, glad she could finally let off steam.

"You're right. I don't know about that," Taylor gave in, surprising Rachel. Her rage subsided slightly.

"Can I tell you something?" Taylor asked and Rachel nodded, "You must promise not to tell anyone, not even Amber or the others."

"I promise," Rachel whispered.

"My current parents aren't my real ones. I was adopted," Taylor said, amazingly calm for such a declaration.

"I'm so sorry," Rachel muttered, now ashamed of her outburst.

"Don't be," Taylor replied.

"What about your real parents?" Rachel inquired, "If that's okay."

"It is. I don't know. My mother left shortly after giving birth to me, leaving me and my dad. He was an alcoholic, but always kind. I don't know why, but one day I was brought to the foster home. I never saw or heard from him again. I lived there, moving from foster family to family, until I was 10 and my dad's sister appeared out of the blue and adopted me," Taylor told her, "They don't know I'm a mermaid." Rachel was amazed how collected Taylor could tell such a story.

"Why don't you want to tell the others?" Rachel inquired. "I don't want to be pitied," Taylor explained, "I know you won't. What about your dad?" "My parents are divorced. It's been many years. They split in unison and their relationship isn't bad. I see him often enough," Rachel told her. Strangely enough after this talk, Rachel felt closer to Rachel

Again they fell into silence until they reached Emily's house. "Here we are," Rachel proclaimed.

"Remember. Not a word," Taylor reminded her and Rachel nodded. They walked up the walkway and entered the house. In the kitchen they found all three families, all there, except for Emily's brother.

"It's nice to meet you. I'm Taylor," the Irish girl introduced herself.

"So you're Taylor. We heard so much about you," Cleo said with a smile. The adults were all introduced and immediately the questioning began. About her life, her mermaid being. Taylor, though feeling a bit cramped, was happy to finally find people that knew of her other half.

"So why did you suddenly decide to come?" Emma asked.

"My mother convinced me," Taylor replied, vaguely.

"We're glad she did," Rikki smiled.

"Don't forget that the full moon is rising soon. Get into your rooms soon," Cleo warned the girls, who nodded.

Just then they heard a door close. "That must be my brother. I can't wait for you to meet him," Emily said, looking up. A few moments later he stood in the door. Upon seeing him, Taylor's eyes widened and her jaw dropped to the ground. This couldn't be happening.

"Is that her?" he asked, motioning towards her.

"Yeah, that's Taylor," Emily introduced.

"Hello Taylor from Ireland," the brother smiled. Before Taylor stood James.

****A/N: **Taylor has found a liking to Emily's brother. How will it end? Who are Taylor's real parents? What will the full moon bring? Please review.**

4. Lies

****A/N: School can be really brutal, but luckily I'm going on a class trip for a week soon. Thus I can't guarantee when the next chapter will come out. Who knows maybe I'll get some good inspiration. So please be patient. Thanks or reading and reviewing. Here is chapter 4. Enjoy!****

****Marril96 Thank you. It means a lot to hear that my writing is improving.
>**

******_Previously... Taylor has arrived in Australia, but due to a mistake she is too early. At the airport she meets James and they immediately hit it off. Then the other arrive. Meanwhile Rachel is jealous of Taylor, who tells her that she can't be replace. Also Taylor finds out about Rachel's issues with her mother. At Emily's house Taylor meets Emily's brother, giving her a bad surprise. Now on to the chapter._**

Chapter 4: Lies

Before Taylor stood James. Time seemed to stop as she stared at him, her eyes wide. What was she supposed to do? Admit they had met at the airport and that she liked him? Liked her friend's brother? Or should she just pretend that the past few hours had never happened? Could she do that?

Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, Taylor said, "It's nice to meet you. You must be Emily's brother."

"Yes, my name is James," James replied and he reached out his hand for her to shake. Taylor contemplated whether or not to take it, but in the end chose to, since it made little difference now. "Have we met before?" he asked, acting as though he was inspecting her appearance, not letting go off her hand.

This was the last chance, Taylor realized. Either she said yes and told the truth, or she declined and added another lie to her long list of untruths. "No, I don't think we have. I've been in Ireland all my life," Taylor answered with a small smile, "So unless you've been to Ireland, I don't think we have." Another lie. Mentally it laid itself down with all the others.

"Sadly I haven't. Maybe I'll visit one day," James replied, nonchalant, but his eyes told her that he was hurt. Taylor forced herself to ignore his gaze and looked away.

"Well I guess that we should go eat dinner. We don't want to impose on you any longer," Cleo said, looking at her watch.

"Same here," Rikki added. Everyone there, except for James, knew that it was an excuse to get the girls into the barricaded rooms before the full moon rose. The McCartneys and the Bennetts left.

"I should go upstairs too. I have some school work to take care of," Emily lied and turned to Taylor, "Why don't I show you your room?" Taylor just nodded, picked up her bag and followed her. She looked back one last time to gaze at James before following Emily up the stairs.

As they passed several doors Emily indicated to each with a short word of what was hidden behind them. "And this is your room," Emily said when they finally stopped at the end of the hallway, "Mine's right next door so if you need anything, don't hesitate to ask." Taylor nodded as she put suitcase on the bed.

It was a nice, cozy room with the standard furniture. Just like Emily's window, hers also faced Mako. "It's really nice," Taylor smiled.

"I'm glad you like it. So do you want to come over into my room for a bit longer?" Emily questioned.

"No, thank you," Taylor replied with a yawn, "I'm pretty tired from the flight and all."

"Okay, good night then," Emily said, leaving the room.

"Be careful," Taylor answered as the door closed.

With a sigh Taylor flopped down on the bed. "It wasn't a complete lie," she reasoned with herself quietly, as though it was possible that someone might overhear her. Indeed she was tired, but other things took precedence to that. Not to mention that the full moon was going to rise any minute and she knew from past experiences that once the moon was up mermaids went to bed in hope of not getting moonstruck. Another person in the room would only be a risk.

However the most important reason was just a few doors down. Slowly Taylor's arm snaked to her backpack, which laid next to her and she pulled out her cell phone. With a grim expression she popped open the lid and took out the battery. His battery, it shot through her head. "No," she thought, shaking her head, "There is no other choice."

Taylor got up, exited her room and walked down the hall. She stopped at the door furthest down. It was James'. Taking a deep breath, she knocked. "Come in," James said and Taylor opened the door to find him lying on his bed, looking at photographs in his hand. He seemed surprised to see her. Not knowing how to start Taylor let her eyes sweep the room. It was a simple room, but one thing that stood out was a wall covered in photos, most likely all taken by him. They showed his family, friends, various sceneries and many other things.

Finally her gaze fell back on James, who looked at her with anticipation. "Here is your battery," Taylor said, slightly uncomfortable as she reached it out to him, but making sure not to meet his gaze, "Who would have thought we would again meet like this?" The small joke was easily drowned by tension in the room.

Silently he accepted the battery. "Thanks for lending it to me. I should go," Taylor babbled on and turned to the door, but suddenly

James asked, "Why did you lie?" The neutral voice made Taylor stop with the doorknob in hand, staring at the door.

"This can't work out. We related," Taylor told him, not being able to bring herself to look at him.

"We're distant relatives," James objected, getting up from his bed, "Like that makes a difference."

"Then how about the fact that you're my friend's brother?" Taylor demanded to know, turning around, "It might not matter to you, but to me. Do you know how Emily will react?"

"I don't, but why should that stop us?" he questioned, stepping up behind, forcing Taylor to bump into the door.

"Because I don't want to lie to her," Taylor told him.

James stared into Taylor's eyes, causing her to fidget nervously. Finally he turned away and sat down on his bed again. "I'll give you yours back tomorrow. Night," James said, motioning towards the battery.

"Thanks for understanding. Good night," Taylor whispered and quickly fled the room with tears in her eyes.

Quietly she walked downstairs and into the backyard. Luckily she didn't meet anyone. Outside Taylor took several deep breaths to calm herself. She didn't want to, but there was no other way. Finally she looked up to see one of the most beautiful sights that she had ever seen. Right in front of her Mako Island could be seen, illuminated by the full moon right overhead. She could feel the magic radiating from there, so powerful, yet soothing. Staring at the view in front of her, Taylor whispered, "Is this really alright?" An almost eerie feeling befell her as just stood there.

Taylor didn't know how long she stared at the spectacle, but when she finally turned to go back inside, the moon was no longer over Mako and the magical feeling was gone. Exhausted from the long day she retired to bed.

When Taylor walked downstairs the next day it was already close to noon, but Emily was still in the kitchen. "Good morning. So how are things?" Taylor asked as Emily put a bowl of cereal in front of her.

"Good so far. I didn't get moonstruck," Emily answered, "Though I don't know about the others. I guess we'll find out once we head to Mako. We're going to show you the moon pool today."

"Sounds great," Taylor smiled.

"I'll go get changed," Emily excused herself and went upstairs.

Taylor had already dressed so that she had the time for breakfast. She was so caught up in her own thoughts that she didn't notice someone else was in the kitchen until a battery was held under her nose. Startled she jumped back, knocking over her chair. Taylor looked up to see James. "Wow, I didn't mean to startle you like

that," he said, looking at her.

"I was just thinking," Taylor replied, taking the battery from his hand, "Thanks." She intended to pick up her chair, but the way James stared at her told her that there was more coming and she forced herself to stay still.

"Why did you lie?" he finally inquired.

Confused Taylor looked at him. "I already told you. Emily is yourâ€¦," she began, but James interrupted, "Not that. Back at the airport you said you were visit friends, not relatives."

The slip-up hit her like a landslide. Damn, he listened well. What now? Taylor took a deep breath and replied, "I find it hard to call Emily and the rest of your family, because this is the first time I met you. So Emily, Sarah and Amber are more friends than anything else."

"I see," James muttered, thoughtfully.

"Everything alright here?" a voice suddenly asked, making them turn to the door. There stood Emily, now fully clothed, staring at the two.

"Everything's fine," Taylor quickly answered, walking over to her, "Lets go. The others are waiting." Emily gave James a confused look before being pulled out of the house by Taylor. Outside Taylor released her grip on Emily.

"Did something happen between you and my brother?" Emily inquired.

"No. I was busy thinking and he startled me. Then you came in," Taylor explained and Emily accepted it with a nod. Taylor hated herself for lying, but what else could she do?

"Look there are the others," Emily called out, breaking through Taylor's thoughts. True enough Sarah, Amber and Rachel were walking up to them.

"So who was moonstruck?" Emily, Amber and Sarah asked in a unison, "Not me. Wait then who was moonstruck?"

Taylor stared at the trio and then asked Rachel, who stood beside her, "Are they always like that?"

"Sometimes," Rachel smirked, "Scary, right?" Taylor nodded.

"Very funny, but seriously, does that mean none of us were moonstruck?" Emily asked.

"Don't look at me. This time I'm innocent," Rachel answered with her hands up in defense.

"And I don't get moonstruck," Taylor added, quickly, "Besides what's so bad if no one was moonstruck this time? Be glad."

"The last time that happened we had crazed tentacles after us for quite some time," Amber retorted, looking at Rachel, who gave a

sheepish look.

"Let's not dwell on it. Maybe we were just too careful this time," Sarah interrupted, "Let's go to Mako." The others nodded and they walked to the edge of the water. Taylor silently extended her hand out to Rachel, who took it with a small smile. Then they dove into the water. Zooming through the water, Rachel stared at Taylor. This brought the reality back. Taylor was really a mermaid and she wasn't. Rachel shook her head. She was being ridiculous. Taylor had told her straightforward that she had no reason to be jealous. Suddenly Rachel realized that her body was tingling all over. It felt weird and she couldn't explain the feeling. Her skin prickled.

Abruptly Taylor stopped swimming, making Rachel look up, forgetting the weird sensation. Taylor stared at the coral reefs surrounding them. Rachel smiled at her as she gave Taylor's hand a squeeze. They exchanged a gaze before Taylor swam after the others.

Finally they surfaced in the moon pool. "That was amazing," Taylor gasped, "We don't have such corals in Ireland."

"Glad you like them," Sarah smiled, "And this is our moon pool."

"So this is your moon pool," Taylor said, thoughtfully as she did a 360, "It's beautiful."

"It seems though that nothing is wrong with the moon pool," Rachel said as she let her hand run down a wall.

"I don't know. I don't trust this," Amber muttered.

"I think you're being paranoid," Emily said.

"Better paranoid than under a microscope," Amber retorted.

"Okay enough," Sarah interrupted them, but then agreed, "Though I have a strange feeling. Something doesn't feel right."

"Why don't we keep showing Taylor around the Gold Coast? The moon pool is fine," Rachel suggested and the other agreed. The five girls swam along the coast, surfacing to show various sights from the water and submerging again to travel and enjoy the sea life.

Finally got out of the water and Amber dried them. They were in front of a café, which had a beautiful view from its terrace. "This is our favorite café," Sarah told Taylor as they sat down at a table outside next to the water. Luckily it was fairly empty for the time of day and they easily found a table for their large group.

"My mother actually worked here when she was a teenager so it sort of has tradition," Emily said with a smile.

"It looks nice," Taylor replied, looking around, "Makes me want to work again."

"You like working as a waitress?" Amber inquired, half surprised, having thought that Taylor worked for the money.

"Yeah. I love interacting with people. Of course the pay does help my allowance, but it's mostly for the fun of it," Taylor smiled as she

thought back to her own café back in Ireland, "I can't say I would want to do that all my life, but for now it's great."

As they waited for their drinks they casually chatted. Suddenly Rachel saw something out of the corner of her eye. It took her a second to realize what it was, but then she jumped up, exclaiming, "Watch out!" Startled and confused the girls first looked up at Rachel and then towards where she was pointing, but it was too late. Seconds later their table was knocked out of the way by something, sending the girls flying to the ground hard.

Cries of panic erupted as the girls looked up to see what had attacked them and froze. In front of them floated a tentacle. "What is going on here?" Taylor demanded to know.

"We have no idea, but we have to stop it before someone gets hurt," Sarah replied.

"What about the people?" Amber questioned, her gaze at the few other guests that were cowering on the ground under a table or behind a chair.

"Rachel," Emily said, making the brunette look up, anticipating, "Get them out of here and then hide with them."

It hurt Rachel that Emily thought that she didn't have the power to help, but now was not the time to nodded and hurried over to the other guests. "Come on. Lets get inside," Rachel told them as she took the hand of someone, helping up.

Meanwhile the remaining four mermaids squared off against the tentacle. "I don't know what you are, where you come from or who sent you, but you're going down," Amber told it as she balled her fist. Bubbles appeared on the tentacle, but still it surged forward at them, causing them to jump apart.

"Damn it. It's too resistant for one person to finish it off," Emily observed.

"Together on three," Sarah said as they got up and the tentacle looped to face them again, "1,2..." Three never came as the tentacle attacked Sarah and Emily, who stood next to each other.

"It won't let us attack," Amber growled as her friends slowly got up, "Why is it so smart?"

"Let me stop it. You finish it off," Taylor told them as she used her magic to turn the water solid, "Now!" Just as the others raised their hands, the tentacle broke free and dashed forward towards them.

"Hey! Over here!" a cry shot through the air. The tentacle stopped inches from them, turning towards it. The girls also stared at the person. It was Rachel.

"Rachel," Emily whispered.

"Come here or are you afraid of a human!" Rachel provoked it.

As though it heard her the tentacle shot towards her. "Now's your

chance!" Rachel yelled to her friends. It took the girls a second to break free of their trance, but then they sprang into action each using their magic. Almost instantly the tentacle came to an abrupt stop before Rachel, twitching and shaking.

Suddenly it gave one final jerk to free itself before it withdrew back into ocean. "What theâ€¦," the girls breathed.

"We have to hurry. People will be here soon," Rachel said, coming over to them.

"But how do we explain it?" Taylor questioned. They stood their thoughtfully as they could hear the first voices from inside the cafÃ©.

Amber's gaze fell on the ground and suddenly an idea came to her. "Sarah," Amber said, making her friends look at her, "Is there a pipe here?"

"Are you crazy? We can't do that!" Emily exclaimed outraged as Sarah closed her eyes to concentrate.

"We don't have a choice. People will be here soon and how do you want to explain that tentacle?" Amber retorted.

"There is one," Sarah informed her friends as she opened her eyes, "We're lucky. It's clean water and probably leads to the ocean later on." The four stared at Emily as the voices grew louder. They could make out the words now.

"Okay," Emily agreed as she felt for the pipe underground and then put out her hand in a stop sign, "Step back." Obediently they did as they were told while Emily activated her power. A split second later the pipe burst, splashing water everywhere.

Seconds later people started to appear. "Oh, a pipe burst," was one of the many murmurs that the girls could hear. With a sigh they quietly stepped back until they were out of sight and then turned down the street.

They walked down the street in silence, each going after their own thoughts. Suddenly Emily broke the silence, whispering, "Rachel." The brunette looked up. "I'm sorry. I never meant for it to seem like that I didn't believe in your powers," Emily told her, "Thanks for helping us. If there is a next time we'll take it on together."

Rachel looked at the blonde and then smiled, "I'll look forward to it." The silence fell on the group again.

"What was that?" Emily asked as they all took a seat in her kitchen.

"It was obviously a tentacle," Amber retorted.

"But it attacked us in public. That's never happened before," Sarah pointed out.

"I swear I have no part in this," Rachel half joked.

"Nobody believes that. We all saw what happened," Taylor replied, "We should consider ourselves lucky that we could blame it on the a busted pipe." The four others had to agree with that.

"Still this means something did happen during the full moon," Emily said, thoughtfully.

"But what? None of us were moonstruck," Amber asked.

"Maybe a new mermaid?" Sarah suggested.

"No way. We all know how hard it is to transform for the first time. Plus, unless you have knowledge about mermaids, there is no way someone knows that they have powers then. The way that tentacle moved was too good. No amateur can control water like that," Rachel objected and as she spoke a suspicion appeared in mind. Her mother. Could she have? Maybe. Would she be willing to? Definitely. A sinking feeling spread through her stomach.

"Is everything alright?" Sarah asked, noticing that her friend's complexion had just paled several shades.

"Everything's fine," Rachel answered, trying to act as normal as possible.

"You sure?" Amber questioned.

"I'm fine," Rachel all but snapped. The girls gave up on trying to extract the truth for now. "I have to go," Rachel whispered, got up and left. Outside she took a deep breath to subside the queasy feeling in her stomach, but it didn't help. If her suspicion was true, then she had no idea how to act. Not in front of her mother, nor her friends. What was she supposed to do now?

Back in the kitchen the girls stared after Rachel. What had happened to her? Taylor felt sorry for Rachel, having guessed the reason for her sudden departure, but she knew she couldn't do anything, nor could she tell her that her mother wasn't involved. More lies.

Before any conversation could pick up again James appeared in the doorway. "What's up?" he asked as he got himself a glass of soda.

"We just witnessed a pipe bursting at the caf  ," Amber quickly said.

"Wow. Is everyone alright?" James asked, though his eyes searched for Taylor's, who looked away.

They all nodded. "Luckily it was clean water," Emily explained.

Just then James stumbled, causing part of the content in his glass to go flying. The girls could only watch in horror as it splashed all over Taylor, who stood there shocked for a moment before sprinting off. "Taylor!" James exclaimed, wanting to run after her, but Amber held him back.

"We'll go look for her," she said as she and the other two hurried after her.

"James," Emily said, having turned back around. James looked up to see his sister lean against the doorframe. "What happened between you and Taylor this morning?" Emily asked.

He looked up at her and replied, "Nothing. I accidentally startled her. That's all."

"Okay," Emily muttered, not sure why, even though they both gave the same answer, she just didn't believe him. Either way she hurried after the others.

Emily finally found them at the entrance to a supply closet with Taylor as a mermaid sprawled on the floor. "You alright?" Emily asked.

"Yeah, but I think I have a broomstick in my back though, so if you would help, I would appreciate it," Taylor answered as Amber balled her hand. Seconds later Taylor stood before them again.

The girls then dispersed, seeing no reason to further wonder about the mystery of the attacking tentacle. Later that evening Taylor laid on her bed, thinking. Mostly about the tentacle. Was it her? Taylor shook her head. It couldn't be.

Suddenly there was a knock at the door, making her sit up. "Come in," Taylor said and a second later the door opened to reveal James. She shot up from her bed as though she had just been shocked. "What are you doing here?" she hissed softly after he had closed the door.

"I wanted to talk to you," he replied, "Are you alright? You suddenly ran off this afternoon."

Taylor stared at him, but luckily she had thought of an answer. "I didn't want the soda to stain my shirt, so I looked for a bathroom," she lied as a knife stabbed her in the heart. Another lie.

"It seems to be fine though," James smiled, "I'm glad."

"Is that all?" Taylor asked, impatiently, knowing any second someone could walk in and catch them.

"No. Emily is on to us," James told her.

"Well she isn't stupid," Taylor retorted, "That's why we have to stay away from each other."

"That's exactly what we shouldn't do," James objected, making Taylor look at him.

"What? What should we do then?" Taylor questioned.

"She'll find out one day and it won't make a difference, if we were beating around the bush the whole time or actually went out," James explained, "I don't know about you, but what I felt yesterday at the airport felt real to me. Maybe you were just humbling me. How should I know." Taylor stared at James, her face bright red. That was the closest thing she had ever gotten to a confession. What should she do? Could she just ignore her feelings? She could stop everything with one sentence.

"I see," James whispered, the disappointment clearly written in his face as he turned back to the door, "Sorry for bothering you for so long. I'll leave you alone now. Good night."

Just as his hand was about to push down the door handle Taylor jumped forward, grabbing onto his shirt and saying, "Don't." It took her a moment to realize what she had done, but then she continued, "I don't know what to do in such a situation. I was never in one, but yesterday was special for me too. I don't know what I'm feeling, but if you'll give me some time"

"Take all the time you need. I'll wait for you," James replied, softly, but not turning around, "Why don't we go out soon?"

"But what about?" Taylor began, but James interrupted, "Don't shoot me down after making such progress." A small smile appeared on her face. "Okay. It's a date," she whispered, softly.

"I'll leave then. Good night," James said and this time Taylor let him walk.

She stood there for a long time, very aware of how red her face was, but that was unimportant. She was pleased of what she did. "One truth. One truth between all those lies," Taylor thought as she turned in for the night.

****A/N: **Who is attacking everyone? Is Rachel right about her mother? How will Taylor's and James' date go and how long can they keep it a secret before they are found out? Please review.**

5. Dates

****A/N: The class trip was awesome and I had a great time. Vacation is around the corner and so that I can enjoy my vacation and think of new ideas, here is the next chapter. Enjoy!****

******_Previously... Taylor lies about knowing James in front of the others, wanting to keep a distance, even though they are attracted to one another. Meanwhile the girls are attacked by a tentacle in public. They are able to defeat it. James is able to persuade Taylor to go on a date with him. Now on to the chapter.**
>

Chapter 5: Dates

"Are you sure about this?" Sarah asked Taylor as they stood on the beach not far from their houses.

"Yes. Go," Taylor reassured them, "I won't die, if I'm on my own for a day." It was two days after James had confessed to her, which had since then been uneventful.

"But still..," Emily began, but Taylor interrupted, "I don't want to be the one responsible, if you have a fall out with your boyfriends."

"You heard her. Lets go," Amber said, giving her two friends a small push into the direction of the road.

"I guess we'll see you later," the three girls replied, waving as they left.

Taylor waved after them until they had disappeared at the horizon and then turned to the ocean. Finally alone. Having been together with them had been great, but it had also meant that she hadn't been able to stall away for a moment. Now standing in front of the ocean, she felt the wind in her hair and nodded. Perfect. Now she could do it. Pursing her lips, Taylor started to whistle the tune she had played so many times before. The wind picked it up, sending it out onto the ocean.

Taylor slowly opened her eyes, her eyes scanning the horizon. Any minute now. "That was a pretty tune," someone said.

"Damn it," Taylor thought as she recognized the voice and turned to see the owner. It was Rachel. "Hey," Taylor replied.

"Where did you learn that melody?" Rachel inquired.

"I created it back in Ireland," Taylor explained, "I like playing it when I see the ocean. Why are you here?"

"I was going for a walk," Rachel replied, "I couldn't stay in my house." The confusion and sadness was obvious.

"You really think she did it?" Taylor asked.

"I don't know, but who else would do such a thing? My mother is the only logical choice," Rachel answered, softly.

Taylor hesitated, seeing the sad girl. Could she tell her? She really cared for her. "I don't think it was your mother," Taylor finally said, making Rachel stare at her.

"What do you mean? You know more?" Rachel demanded to know, grasping Taylor by the shoulder.

"No," Taylor protested, firmly, pulling herself free from Rachel's iron grip and staggering back, "I just don't think it was your mother. Your mother has had so many years to transform back. Why now?"

"Because her family is breaking apart a second time!" Rachel cried, but an instant later a sharp pain went through her cheek.

Taylor stood in front of her with her hand up. She had slapped Rachel. "I'm sorry," Taylor whispered, "It's justâ€¦"

"No, I should be the one to apologize. The thought of my mother doing this is just too scary. I don't want it to be true," Rachel muttered, weakly.

"Don't think like that until it has been proven true," Taylor told her and thought at the same time, "I will do the same."

Suddenly Taylor's phone rang. She had gotten a message. "Meet me at the house," it read and was from James. "I have to go," Taylor said, looking towards the ocean one last time, "Don't think about it too

much." Rachel nodded as Taylor left. Rachel turned back to the ocean. Could she just stop thinking about it?

Back at Emily's house, Rachel found James in the backyard, sitting on a patio chair, enjoying the view of the ocean. "You called," Taylor said, smiling as she came up from behind.

"I thought since my sister and her friends gave you the day off, we could finally go out," James told her.

"I guess," Taylor agreed, "What did you have in mind?"

"Just follow me," James smiled as he grabbed her hand and pulled her along to his car, "Don't worry. I promise you won't see Emily or any of the others." Taylor debated with herself, whether she should ask how he knew that, but decided to just wait and see.

A while later they pulled up at a parking lot in front of the Marine Park, which seemed to be an amusement park and an aquarium in one. "Perfect," Taylor thought as she got out of the car, "Why all the water?" Though now she knew why James thought that Emily would never go here.

"My sister isn't a big fan of water so she never goes here," James confirmed her suspicions, but then saw the look on Taylor's face, "Don't tell me you're alsoâ€¦"

"No, it's fine. Just surprised by the choice, that's all," Taylor quickly interrupted, not being able to disappoint him, "Lets go." She put on a fake smile and pulled him to the entrance.

* * *

><p>"I'm here," Sarah smiled as she walked up to Ryan on the street and kissed him, "So what's the plan?" She had separated from Amber and Emily a while back and had made her way here.<p>

"I thought we could visit a friend of yours," Ryan said, getting a confused look from Sarah.

"Who?" she asked, curiously.

"You'll find out soon enough," Ryan grinned as he led her along the many streets of the Gold Coast. It soon dawned on her where she was going.

"Who could I be meet there, if it's what I think it is?" Sarah asked.

"You'll see," Ryan smiled.

"But we are goingâ€¦," Sarah began and ended, when she saw the entrance, "The Marine Park. I knew it. What are we doing here?"

"Like I said, meeting a friend," Ryan repeated as he pulled her to the entrance, "Come on."

* * *

><p>"There you are," Jordan said as Amber came up to him and gave him a kiss, "Glad I didn't get a call this time, saying that you wouldn't be able to make it."<p>

"Yeah, I felt like coming today," Amber retorted with a smirk, but then looked around at the crowded entrance of the Marine Park, "So where are we going?"

"We're here," Jordan replied, curtly.

"Here as in the Marine Park?" Amber asked, "Are you crazy? You know what I am."

"I wanted to go to a place, where we wouldn't by accident run into any of the others. I want you to myself for a day," Jordan answered, "Is that too much to ask for?"

Amber stared at him. In a way it was really sweet. "Okay, but we're staying away from any water," Amber agreed to which Jordan nodded and they entered the marina.

* * *

><p>"So where are we going?" Emily asked as she followed Daniel.<p>

"I thought we could go on a typical normal date," he answered.

"Don't we always? We go to the movies and such," Emily inquired, "Or what do you consider normal?"

"How about a quiet trip to theâ€¦," Daniel began, but Emily interrupted when she saw their destination, "Aquarium. So this is normal?"

"Come on. I promise we'll stay away from any water," Daniel told her.

"Well okay," Emily gave in, "But you know I would have gone anywhere with you. It didn't have to be the Marine Park." They smiled at each other as they entered the amusement park.

* * *

><p>Rachel strolled along the roads towards her house. Taylor was right. Why would her mother turn back into a mermaid now? Finally she arrived at her house and entered it. "I'm home," Rachel said as she walked into the kitchen.<p>

"Ah, Rachel, you're just in time. I made some lunch," Charlotte greeted her.

"Perfect," Rachel smiled, or at least she tried to. Her mother set a plate of sandwiches in front of her.

"Want some water?" Charlotte asked and Rachel nodded.

Watching her mother, whose hands got some water on them, Rachel thought, "Maybe I was wrong. She seems to be completely

normal."

Charlotte placed the water in front of Rachel, but as she pulled her hand back, it knocked into the glass, tipping it over. The water splashed onto Rachel's arm. It took all of Rachel's self-control not to jump up and try to dry her arm. "I'm sorry," Charlotte said, but by the intent look on her face, Rachel knew she had done it on purpose. To see if she would transform into a mermaid. Angrily Rachel stood up, knocking over her chair in the process and stormed to the door.

"I have to go," Rachel choked through the fury.

"What about lunch?!" Charlotte called after her, but Rachel had already slammed the door shut behind her. She looked after her daughter quizzically. She hadn't transformed, but she hadn't acted normal either.

Rachel ran and only slowed down gradually until she was down to a walk. So her mother knew more than she let on. Maybe she hadn't been wrong with the initial thought of her being their attacker? But then why did she attack her own daughter? Did she hate her that much?

Subconsciously Rachel's feet had carried her to the Marine Park. When she finally looked up and really took in her surroundings, Rachel stood in front of the ticket counter. By the annoyed look of the cashier she had been standing there for a while. "What will it be?" the cashier demanded, sternly.

"Actuallyâ€¦," Rachel began, wanting to explain the situation, but then decided differently, "One student please." There must have been a reason she had gone here. With her ticket in hand and a "have a good time" from the cashier Rachel crossed the threshold of the park. As expected on such a nice day many people, from young to old, were there.

Ambling through the park, Rachel decided to head towards the aquarium. It was times like these, seeing all sorts of couples, that she wished Alex was still here and not back in their hometown. All of the sudden a face caught her eye. Her mom! What was she doing here? However when she looked back to where her mother had stood, no one was there. "You're going crazy, Rachel," she muttered to herself as she reached the aquarium.

Just as she was about to enter, she saw two heads. Sarah and Ryan. What were they doing here? It seemed like a bad place for a date with a mermaid. Sarah seemed to be following Ryan somewhere. Deciding it was a bad idea to go in the same direction and running the risk of accidentally interrupting their date, Rachel turned on her heels and wandered into another direction.

"Where are we going?" she could hear Sarah ask.

"We're almost there," Ryan smiled as they finally halted in front of a tank. Behind the glass swam a dolphin.

"Kylie!" Sarah exclaimed, immediately recognizing the daughter of the dolphin that her mother had been so attached to, "How have you been?" The dolphin clicked her reply, happy to see her. Out of happiness the

dolphin did a flip.

"Wow, you were right," someone said, making Sarah turn around to see a worker of the aquarium, probably a dolphin trainer.

"Right about what?" Sarah questioned, confused, looking from Ryan to the trainer and back.

"He said he knew a way to cheer Kylie up," the trainer explained.

"I was here a few days ago when I overheard John talking about how sad Kylie seemed to be lately," Ryan continued, "I told him I knew a way to cheer her up."

"I didn't think a girl would be able to cheer Kylie up," John replied, "What's your name?"

"Sarah," she introduced herself.

"As in Sarah Sertori?" John asked and Sarah nodded, "So you're the daughter of Cleo Sertori. That explains it. You've known Kylie since she was little. You seem to have the same knack for dolphins as your mother. Have you considered becoming a dolphin trainer?"

"I haven't," Sarah answered.

"You should," John suggested, "Also come visit Kylie more often. It seems to make her very happy."

"I will," Sarah said, having turned back to Kylie, "I promise. I'm sorry, if I haven't visited you in a long time."

"Dolphins are very social. She considers you a friend," John explained.

"And she is mine," Sarah smiled at dolphin, who nodded profusely. John took that as his sign to leave. "Thanks for bringing me here," Sarah said.

"You're welcome," Ryan smiled, glad to see his girlfriend so happy.

On the other side of the tank stood James and Taylor. "It says the dolphin's name is Kylie," Taylor says, reading the sign and then looked around for it.

"You like dolphins?" James asked and Taylor nodded, "Why don't we go on the water roller coaster? It's a real attraction." It was right next to the aquarium.

"But the line looks so long," Taylor lied, uneasily. "

Okay, you don't want to go on the water roller coast or any other water attraction that we've walked past," James said, reminding her of the other attractions that they had passed, "What do you want to do?"

"Why don't we get something to eat?"

"Sounds great," James willingly agreed. Taylor was really enjoying

herself. Going out with James had been a good idea. She was finally able to free her mind of all the mermaid stuff.

Of course reality couldn't let Taylor have too much fun and decided to crash her party. Suddenly Taylor saw someone down the path she was walking. Emily and Daniel. Quickly she pulled James behind a hedge. "What's wrong?" James asked.

"I saw Emily," Taylor told him.

"Emily?" James repeated, "Are you sure?" Taylor gave him a look. "Okay, lets go somewhere else," James said and pulled Taylor along.

He led her into the a theater, where instead of a stage in the middle there was a giant pool. This was probably the place where the dolphin and whatnot shows were performed. Since nothing was planned for the time, it was completely empty. "Why don't you wait here. I'll get something to eat," James suggested and Taylor nodded, taking a seat on one of the many seats.

Taylor rested her head on her hand, looking out at the pool. Suddenly a dolphin head popped out of the water. It was Kylie, if Taylor saw it correctly. Curiously she walked up to the edge of the pool. "Hey you," Taylor smiled. Kylie playfully nodded her head. Suddenly she used her nose to splash water at Taylor, which hit dead on. Astonished Taylor's mind went haywire. She couldn't transform here. James would be back soon. With no other choice Taylor dove into the pool.

Kylie greeted the mermaid underwater with a friendly nudge. Taylor petted the dolphin and decided to make the most of the situation and swam along side it for the moment.

* * *

><p>Meanwhile Emily and Daniel were at a stand, eating an ice cream. "This place really has the best ice cream," Emily smiled, taking another lick from her strawberry one.<p>

"Really?" Daniel asked, "Mine tastes ordinary. Let me taste yours." Before Emily knew what he was doing, Daniel had grabbed her wrist and taken a lick of her ice cream. "You're right. Yours tastes really good," he smiled.

"Hey, no fair," Emily complained, "I want a lick too." Obliging hand held his chocolate ice cream out to him and Emily took a bite out of it.

"Now that's unfair," Daniel joked, "You took a bite."

"Try and catch me," Emily smiled and took off in a sprint.

However she saw a face that made her come to an abrupt stop. There in the distance she saw James. "James," she whispered, confused. Wasn't he at home studying for some exam?

"Gotcha," Daniel said as his arms wrapped around his girlfriend, "What's wrong?"

"I just saw my brother right overâ€|," she began, but when she pointed to the spot, he was gone, "Great now I'm imagining things."

"Why don't we head to the aquarium," Daniel suggested and Emily nodded.

* * *

><p>Meanwhile Amber and Jordan had been walking around the park in silence mostly. Now they had slowly made their way to the aquarium. "Listen, I'm not going to apologize every time I have to take care of mermaid stuff," Amber finally said, "You should grow up and not always be jealous."<p>

"Jealous," Jordan repeated, "I'm not jealous. Just annoyed that you always go racing off when a tentacle comes calling."

"What else am I supposed to do? Except for Taylor, Rachel, Emily, Sarah and me no one can defeat them," Amber hissed.

Before James could say anything a piercing scream went through the air, making everyone look up. A boat from the water roller coast was stuck halfway down the slope and didn't seem to be moving anymore. "This is bad," Jordan said.

"Something isn't right here," Amber muttered.

"What do you mean?" Jordan asked, looking at her.

"There!" Amber exclaimed, pointing at a tentacle that was coming from one of the many tanks, "It's attacking again. Jordan, you have to evacuate the park."

"What about you?" Jordan asked.

"I have to stop this," Amber told him.

"There you go again," Jordan complained.

"We don't have time for this. People's lives are at stake, Jordan," Amber snapped and with that ran off, "Please, just do it."

In dead sprint Amber pulled out her phone and dialed all four mermaids. Everyone but Taylor picked up. "We have a problem. A tentacle is attacking. Where? At the Marine Park. You're here too?!" Sarah, Amber and Emily said in unison.

"You really should stop that," Rachel told them, dryly, partially freaked out by the synchronicity, "But I'm here too."

Suddenly an alarm sounded and an announcement was made, "Attention all visitors. The park is having some troubles. Please go to your nearest exit in an orderly fashion." Almost immediately panic ensued, forcing the girls to fight against the stream of people, running away from the roller coaster and to the exit.

Finally the four arrived at the bottom of the water roller coast at the same time and closed their cell phones. "Looks like the only one missing is Taylor," Sarah observed.

"I tried to call her, but she didn't answer," Amber replied.

"Sorry, but I couldn't get to my phone," Taylor said, surfacing at the edge of the tank next to the four.

"Taylor!" they exclaimed.

"Why are you in the tank?" Emily asked.

"Long story," Taylor answered as Sarah used her power to lift Taylor out of the water and Amber used hers to dry her, "So we all went here?" They all nodded.

"We don't have time for this. We have to save those people," Sarah pointed out and they turned to the water coaster.

The five girls stared at the water slide. The water had been turned to rock hard gelatin. "No way," Emily muttered, staring at it.

"That means...", Sarah began and Rachel ended, "Whatever is attacking us has your powers, Taylor." The words hit Taylor like a bolt of lightning. It couldn't be.

"But how?" Amber asked, "You said you're the only one from your moon pool right?"

"Yeah," Taylor answered, numbly.

"We can think about this later. Taylor, you have to turn this back to water," Emily interrupted and Taylor nodded as she stepped forward. Turning her hand, she carefully turned the gelatin back into water. The boat from the roller coaster dropped down, causing a huge wave to splash, which just barely missed the girls. As soon as it had stopped moving the last few passengers got out and ran for an exit.

"How lucky for us that no one was hurt," Emily said.

"But isn't it strange," Amber began, "I thought I saw
aâ€|"

"Tentacle!" Rachel exclaimed, causing everyone to jump to the side as the tentacle zoomed through the spot they had just stood.

"That was close," Sarah breathed as they got up.

"Lets finish this thing before it damages something," Amber told the other, who nodded.

All five activated their powers, instantly freezing the tentacle. Just as it was about to explode, someone said, "Everything is clear." Amber whirled around to see Jordan standing there, causing her to lose her concentration on the tentacle.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded, furiously, "I thought I told you to evacuate as well."

"I wanted to make sure you're alright," Jordan retorted.

"Who is the mystical being? It's too dangerous for you," Amber

snapped.

"You know what, I was concerned about you, but I see there is no need for that with the great Amber," he spat and turned to leave, "We're through!" All four girls gasped at that declaration, while Amber didn't as much as flinch.

The tentacle used this moment where everyone's concentration was on Amber and Jordan to break free of its magical restraints and shot towards Jordan. "Jordan, watch out!" Amber exclaimed and instinctively threw herself between him and the tentacle. The tentacle hit her, sending her flying. With a thud Amber landed on the ground, unmoving.

"Amber!" the four girls exclaimed, but it was Jordan, who was already at her side.

He cradled her limp body. "Amber, Amber, get a hold of yourself," he told her.

The four girls stared at the two people on the ground, but then their rage turned to the tentacle. "We won't forgive you," they said in a unison as they all raised their hands and activated their power. The tentacle was no match for their magic combined with their fury. In a matter seconds it exploded.

Then they all ran over to Amber. "Amber, wake up," Emily said, shaking her.

"It's not working," Sarah sobbed, close to tears.

"Amber, I'm sorry. I should have listened to you. You were right when you said that it was too danger," Jordan whispered.

"Can-Can you say that again?" a soft voice asked, making everyone look up. Amber's eyes were slowly opening.

"Amber!" the crowd exclaimed.

"Did you get it?" Amber questioned and the girls nodded.

Carefully she got up. "Are you sure you should be getting up?" Jordan asked, concerned.

"The tentacle knocked the window out of me pretty hard. I might be black and blue tomorrow, but I'll be fine," Amber answered.

"Thank god," Jordan whispered as he hugged her.

"So we're not broken up?" Amber inquired. Instead of an answer, Jordan kissed her.

They then walked for the exit. Just outside of the Marine Park was still a giant crowd. "You realize we're turning into one of them?" Rachel asked Taylor, "We were also in sync." They laughed, though Taylor's was only halfhearted. She was looking around for James, but he was nowhere to be seen. Had he gone home?

"Taylor!" someone called through the crowd, making her look up to see James pushing through to her. Taylor's eyes widened in horror. Only

when he got to her did he see his sister and her friends next to Taylor.

"James? What are you doing here?" Emily asked, surprised, "You were here with Taylor? Come to think of it, you never told me why you were here."

The two looked from Emily to each other. "Yes, we were here together," Taylor finally admitted, "You see I ran into James after I returned back to your house and he asked what I was going to do, now that you were gone for the day. I had nothing to do, so he suggested, going somewhere to beat the time. That's all."

"Oh, I see," Emily said with relief, "I nearly though you were on a date." They all laughed though for James and Taylor it was a weak one. That had been a close call.

"Why don't we walk home?" Sarah suggested, "It doesn't look like they're going to open the park again anytime soon." The others nodded.

* * *

><p>Meanwhile Charlotte had taken in the mail and was leafing through it. A folded piece of paper caught her eye and she opened it. It read, "If you want to know the truth about your daughter, come to this place." Below was an address and a date. No signature.<p>

"Interesting," Charlotte muttered as she looked over the letter again.

**A/N: **Is Charlotte the one attacking? Who send the mysterious note and apparently knows of Rachel's secret. Please review.

6. Understanding

A/N: I'm sorry it took so long. I didn't mean to, but I had a bad case of writer's block. Luckily it cleared up now, because I soon have to write some important and I know I won't get to writing much then. However I promise I'll bring a chapter out in time for Christmas. Anyway a big thanks as always to my readers. Here is chapter 6. Enjoy!

Chapter 6: Understanding

Rachel felt like she was suffocating in her own house. It wasn't that her mother was monitoring her every waking moment, no it was more the opposite. Ever since her mother had 'accidentally' poured water over her, they barely talked at all. It was more the hostile air, the distrust, that seemed to rob her of any oxygen. Now they only talked when necessary and barely saw each other, but Rachel saw the way her mother stared at her, still not convinced. Not for her own safety did she stay away from her mother, but for the other four, the real mermaids, did she do it. Even it made her life a living hell. Rachel liked her mom, even if she had been a power crazed mermaid. She was her only real family left, whether she liked it or not.

Rachel walked down the stairs and to the front door. Passing her

mother, who was in the kitchen, she said, "I'm leaving." Her mother's silence to her hit her like a knife. They couldn't exist like this beside each other forever, could they? They had to, if neither was willing to back down. Outside Rachel inhaled the salty sea air and walked along the street to her fellow mermaids' homes. She wished she could tell them, but it was not their battle to fight. Not to mention with the tentacle attacking a lot lately, like at the amusement park only two days ago, she could hardly bother them with such a matter. At least there was one person she could talk to. The sea breeze tugged at her gloomy mood and then pulled it away completely, leaving Rachel a lot happier, though the thought was still imprinted into the back of her mind.

As she stepped up to Emily's door, Rachel was prepared to ring the bell, when she heard voices coming from the backyard. Deciding to around the back, she stopped short, when she realized who was talking. It was James and Taylor. "That was really close at the amusement park," Rachel heard Taylor say.

"Sorry, I would have never taken you, if I had known that my sister would be there," James replied.

"I really think it would be for the best, if we laid low for a while. Emily is really suspicious already," Taylor told him, firmly.

Rachel couldn't believe her ears. As if she didn't have enough problems. Deciding that it would be bad to get caught up in this too, she slowly backed up, hoping to pretend that she had heard nothing. Unfortunately she stepped on a twig, which of course, made the loudest sound possible for such a small twig, immediately capturing James' and Taylor's attention. With a silent curse Rachel stepped around the corner to see the two standing in front of a table, probably been sitting until a moment ago. Seeing Rachel Taylor felt a hint of relief, having thought that it was Emily that had heard them.

"I should get going," James said and walked inside, leaving the two girls, who stared at each other for a while longer. Finally Taylor sunk to a chair, her head low.

"So you and James?" Rachel asked, softly, stepping towards her. Taylor only nodded, seeing no point in lying anymore. "Why? How?" Rachel inquired as she sat down opposite of Taylor, where James had sat before her.

"I know it's crazy, you don't have to tell me that, but I can't help it. I first met James at the airport by chance. We hit it off so well. I would have never gone out with him, if I had know who he was, but now it's too late," Taylor explained, looking up with a look of despair.

"How much does he know?" Rachel asked.

"Nothing. He doesn't know anything," Taylor assured her, quickly, "So? Are you going to tell Emily?"

Just then Emily, Sarah and Amber came out onto the porch. "There you are, Taylor. Rachel, you're here too? What's up?" Emily asked, surprised to see Rachel.

Rachel could feel all four pairs of eyes on her, but Taylor's burned the most. "Nothing. I was just coming around," Rachel finally replied. Taylor gave her look of thanks.

"It's actually quite good timing. We thought that we would want to visit Mako," Amber said.

"We remembered that we never did figure out more about those visions that we had, so we thought that maybe going to Mako might help us," Sarah explained.

"I'm game," Taylor agreed, happy to get away from all the madness.

"Okay," Rachel added.

Just as the girls got up, a piece of paper flew by, landing directly on Taylor's face. "Who turned off the light?" the blonde asked, her arms flailing.

The four others laughed as Sarah pulled away the paper. "It's just a piece of paper," Sarah chuckled, making Taylor join in the laughter.

When they finally calmed down, Emily grasped it, complaining, "Who forgot to throw this in the trash? Littering is bad for the environment."

"Here comes Captain Environment to the rescue," Amber joked, looking over her friend's shoulder at the paper, "Hey, wait this is part of a newspaper."

"So?" Emily questioned.

"It's an article about some cruise ship coming to the Gold Coast," Amber continued.

"I remember hearing about it. It's called MS Queen Anne and is one of the largest cruise ships in the world. It's supposed to be a real attraction. It should be in port today," Sarah recalled.

"I also heard of it. I had actually wanted to visit it later on," Taylor said, "It was build not far from where I live."

"Why don't we? After we go to Mako we can drop by and look at it. From our point of view, it should be magnificent," Rachel suggested and the others nodded.

"Then it's decided," Emily smiled and then the five finally walked down the dock and dove into the water. Grasping Rachel's hand, Taylor pulled her friend behind her. Again Rachel had the weird sensation that made her whole body tingle. What was it?

After surfacing in the moon pool, Taylor recapped, "So you used your powers at the same time and then your necklace activated." The four nodded. "Sounds easy enough to recreate," Taylor said as the other three activated their powers.

While Sarah made a funnel of water rise from the center of the moon pool, Amber's and Emily's powers battled over freezing and boiling

it. Anxiously all five girls watched Rachel's necklace, but nothing happened. "It doesn't seem to be working," Sarah said as she let the funnel splash back into the water.

"Maybe we're doing something wrong," Amber suggested with a shrug.

"But what?" Emily retorted.

"Maybe, because Taylor is now here the vision has been fulfilled and its only purpose was to bring Taylor here," Rachel hypothesized.

"But then why was I brought here?" Taylor asked. With a sigh all five leaned against a rock, defeated. They were clueless.

"It doesn't look like we're going to get anywhere like this," Sarah said, breaking the silence, "Why don't we go see the cruise ship?" The other four agreed and once again the five were underway.

Zooming towards the docks of the Gold Coast they could already from a distance see the black wall that was the hull of the ship. At a safe distance they surfaced and gasped. In front of them stretched a giant ship, which rivaled anything they had seen in size and luxury. The white paint glowed in the sun. "Amazing," Taylor whispered, her eyes not leaving the ship. The other four could only nod.

"This must be how the people felt when they saw the Titanic for the first time," Sarah said, "So small."

"Humans really can outdo themselves over and over," Emily added.

Just then they started to feel the pull of water as the propellers were started. "Looks like we came in time to see it depart," Amber told them, "Perfect timing." While the four mermaids watched in awe, Rachel was feeling weaker and weaker. Even though she was able to hold her breath for a long time, she had little of strength of being able to swim for a long time left. Now, with the propeller pulling at her, she was getting close to her limit as she held on more and more to Taylor, who was supporting her partially.

Taylor noticed the added grip on her arm and looked to her human friend, noticing that she was exhausted. She let her eyes wander across the shoreline, where she saw an empty pier, possibly deserted, since there was a new one, though a bit way from the main docks, but directly in line with the ship's departure line. "Guys, lets watch the ship from over there," Taylor suggested, pointing to the pier.

"Okay," the three mermaids agreed and dove underwater.

"You okay?" Taylor asked, looking at Rachel.

"I bit tired, but I'll be fine, once I get land under my feet again," Rachel answered, "Thanks."

"No problem," Taylor replied, "Sorry, that we forgot you're a|, well a| you. We don't want to exhaust you unnecessarily. Tell us, if you are." Solemnly Rachel nodded. Why was she so weak compared to her

four friends? It irked her.

After they had reached the pier and dried themselves, they turned back to the main spectacle, sitting at the edge of the pier. The ship was slowly pulling away from the docks under the cheer of the crowd. "This is pretty amazing," Sarah mused.

"Maybe one day we should take a cruise," Amber suggested.

"Us mermaids? On the wide ocean, completely surrounded by water? I'm not sure that's such a good idea," Emily retorted.

"But it would be nice," Taylor replied, "Being completely surround by water. Feeling the power of it." Rachel stayed silent. She could no longer understand them like before. No fear of water nor transforming or the feeling of the power of water. Only the almost synthetic feel of power was left, which did not nearly give enough to make her stop longing for it. She could never again be truly a part of this group, no matter how much she or them tried.

Just then she heard footsteps and then a voice said, "Rachel."

Startled all five of them turned around. "Mom," Rachel muttered, surprised as she stood up, "What are you doing here?"

"I'm guessing the same as you," Charlotte simply replied, motioning towards the ship.

"Oh, right," Rachel whispered, almost relieved.

"How did you get here? I don't remember seeing you up ahead, when I walked here?" Charlotte asked. The girls froze. What could they possibly say?

Suddenly, before anyone could say anything, a tentacle shot out of the water right in front of the pier. The five girls stared in horror at it, while Charlotte stammered, "What theâ€¦!"

The tentacle seemed to ponder what to do for a moment, just floating in the air, but then it shot forward towards Charlotte. "Mom!" Rachel exclaimed as she instinctively lunged for her mother, tackling her to the ground and out of the tentacle's way. "You okay?" she asked.

"Yeah," Charlotte muttered, dazed, "What is going on here?"

"Just stay down," Rachel instructed, stepping in front of her mother protectively. No matter how much her mother aggravated her at times, she would not lose one of her few family members.

"Rachel!" the four other girls exclaimed and wanted to run to her, but the tentacle shot between them, forcing them to a stop. Carefully they took a step back. Suddenly the tentacle whip lashed out at them, making the four mermaids fly off the pier into the water.

"You guys!" Rachel cried, but had no time to do anything as the tentacle came rushing towards her and her mother again. What was she going to do? The others couldn't help her, but she couldn't use her powers now, could she? Glancing over her shoulder, she saw her

confused and partially scared mother. She had no choice.

Taking a deep breath, she called the water up from around the pier just in time to form a shield around her and her mother. A split second later the tentacle came crashing into it. She was able to hold it for a moment before she was overwhelmed and the shield disintegrated. Rachel staggered backwards, expecting another attack, but none came. Looking around, the tentacle was gone.

"Rachel," she heard her mother whisper behind her, but Rachel ignored it and hurried to the edge of the pier.

"Are you guys alright?" Rachel asked, looking down at her friends.

"We'll be fine," Sarah called up.

"Give me your hand. I'll pull you up," Rachel said as she took a hold of Taylor's arm.

Just then Charlotte stepped up behind her. Seeing them, she could only stare at the four mermaids. "You all are mermaids," she stammered astonished.

Rachel looked up at her mother, let go of Taylor and stood up. "That's right. They're mermaids," she confirmed, trying to sound as confident as possible.

"They? What about you?" Charlotte questioned, confused.

Rachel hesitated, but then told her, "I was a mermaid until last year. Through circumstances I lost my powers and now all that I have left is this necklace, which allows me to use my powers. I can't transform however." Rachel waited for a reaction, but Charlotte only stared at her. "Mom? Say something," Rachel whispered after a while.

Suddenly Charlotte grabbed Rachel's arm hard. "Come on, Rachel! We're going!" Charlotte ordered, dragging her daughter behind her.

"No," Rachel protested, trying to pull herself free in vain.

"I forbid you to ever see them again," Charlotte continued.

"Let me go!" Rachel yelled and yanked her arm free. Charlotte stared at her daughter. "They are my friends, mom. I don't care that you can't stand them. I don't care that you make them responsible for ending your mermaid being. They are my friend," Rachel told her, firmly.

"How can you call them friends when they obviously have a part in your no longer being a mermaid?" Charlotte demanded to know, "How can you call someone your friend, when they took the best thing in your life? Do you honestly think you'll ever be equal to them again?"

Rachel stared at her. "You're right," Rachel admitted softly, "I lost my powers because of them. However they saved me from dying instead. Sounds like a good deal to me. And maybe I won't be ever able to swim like that again and be exactly like them, but I don't need to. I am

different and that is fine. They accept me like this. So I won't ever betray them."

Charlotte looked at her daughter in silence. Finally she said, "Very well. I won't lie and say that I like this, but I can't stand in the way of your happiness. Even if I might not show it very often, I do care for you, Rachel. At least now I know the truth." Rachel stared at her. Relief flooded her as she realized that it had not been her mother that had attacked them. She had worried for nothing, just like Taylor had said. And now that her mother knew, maybe they could patch things up again. "Well, I'm leaving," Charlotte told them and turned to leave, muttering, "The note was right."

"What note?" Rachel inquired, confused.

"I got a note, saying that if I wanted to know the truth I was to come here today," Charlotte explained and then left.

Just then the four mermaids came back on the pier, now human again. "But that meansâ€¦," Amber began and Emily ended, "Someone knows about us."

"And I'm guessing whoever that is, is the one who is sending those tentacles after us," Taylor concluded.

"Not only that, but they know how we act," Rachel added.

"But why? What did we ever do to them?" Sarah questioned.

"That is just one of the many things, we'll have to ask them when we catch them," Emily answered.

"Look," Sarah said and pointed to the ocean. Only a short distance away, the Queen Anne was floating past them, the sunset in its back.

"Simply beautiful," Taylor whispered as they watched the spectacle.

"Who is our attacker? Why did they do this? They obviously wanted mom to figure out the truth. But why? To help us make up?" Rachel thought in silence, but shook her head, "No that was impossible." What was that person after?

****A/N: ****First of the ship is a parody on the Queen Elizabeth, or whichever other great ships there are. Who is that person indeed. Thankfully it is not Charlotte, but then who is it and what did he or she gain by doing this? Also tension seems to be flying with between Taylor and James. Please review.

7. Waves

****A/N: Happy Holidays, everyone! I hope everyone is having a great time. Here is my present from me to you. I'm thrilled that I am able to keep my promise and upload in time for Christmas. Thank you for reading to everyone. Here is chapter 7. Enjoy!****

Previously... Rachel and her mother weren't speaking anymore, while the others tried to find out why Taylor was brought there. Rachel

confesses to her mother the truth after they are attacked by their unknown opponent. Reluctantly Charlotte calls a truce and leaves the girls wondering, what the objective of their enemy is. Now on to the chapter.

>

Chapter 7: Waves

"This is so nice," Taylor muttered, looking out at the sunset on the ocean from the patio, "There are few days in Ireland when you can do this."

"I can imagine," Rachel agreed, sitting next to her. All five girls sat on Emily's patio and were watching the sunset.

"To just be able to relax," Sarah added, stretching herself.

"I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but," Emily began, but Amber interrupted, "Then don't."

"But don't forget what tomorrow is," Emily continued with a scowl towards Amber.

"I was hoping to forget about that," Amber replied.

Taylor wondered what they were talking about. Rachel, seeing Taylor's confused look, explained, "School starts for us tomorrow."

"Oh, I see," Taylor replied, slightly disappointed.

"I can't believe school starts again tomorrow," Amber sighed.

"I know. Our vacation really flew by quickly," Sarah agreed.

"Can you blame it? We went to Ireland and were busy fightingâ€| whatever it is," Emily replied.

"Well I guess I should start looking for a flight back home," Taylor muttered, sadly.

"Why?" the four others chorused.

"What's the point of staying here, if you're always at school or busy with homework? Also my school starts in a week or so as well. I have to get home and start preparing," Taylor explained.

"That's true, but isn't there anyway for you to stay?" Sarah asked.

"I don't see one. How am I supposed to explain to my mother that I want to stay here and go to school on the basis of liking it here?" Taylor retorted.

"But we never figured out why you were supposed to come here to begin with," Emily protested.

"Then I guess we never will," Taylor said.

"Then we have to think of how we are going to spend your last few days," Amber suggested, but Taylor simply nodded.

"I'll go upstairs so you can get ready for your first day of school," Taylor told them.

"Poor Taylor," Rachel thought as she watched her go inside, "It's not just us she is leaving behind, but James and this whole mystery."

Taylor flopped onto her bed with a sigh. What was she going to do while the others are at school? More importantly her own school would start soon, so that she would have to return in due time. She didn't want to leave however, especially not, if she still had no idea why she was brought here in the first place. Most definitely if it meant parting from James. They hadn't had the chance to figure out what they meant to one another yet.

Taylor looked up when she heard her door open. It was James. "Everything alright?" he asked as he sat down next to her.

"Everything's fine," she lied.

"Good to know. Actually I wanted to know if you would go out with me tomorrow, since my sister and her friends are going back to school?" James asked, "My break is a bit longer than theirs. We could go to the beach"

"Sorry, I can't," Taylor answered. It killed Taylor inside. She wanted to go out with James. Go to the beach and show him what she is, but she couldn't. How could she know how he would react. She couldn't risk it. Not without putting the others in danger of being found out as well.

"Why not? They're in school. There is no way they could catch us," James objected.

"That's what you said about the amusement park as well," Taylor reminded him, "It's just I have to make preparations to leave again. My school is starting soon too."

"Then all the more reason to spend the last few days that we have together," James retorted.

Before Taylor could say anything, she heard footsteps coming towards her door. Quickly she pushed James from the bed, so that he was behind it, and a moment later Emily opened the door. Taylor gave a silent sigh of relief. "Hey Taylor. You left your phone downstairs and it rang. It's your mom," Emily told her as she handed it to her and left again.

"Hello mom," Taylor said, putting the phone to her ear, "How are you? It's been a while."

"Well whose fault is that? If you don't call I'll have to," Bella laughed, "I'm fine. How about you?"

"Just fine. Australia is really nice," Taylor replied as she waved to James, who left after making sure no one saw him.

"Listen, I'm calling because of school," Bella began.

"I know. It starts soon. The school here starts tomorrow," Taylor said, "I was going to look for a flight back soon."

"But you want to stay?" Bella asked, catching the tension in her daughter's voice.

"I know it's impossible. I'll call you again when I find a flight," Taylor answered.

"That's not what I asked. If money and such was not a problem, would you want to stay," Bella repeated, "And don't lie, because you think it could hurt my feelings. I can understand it, if you do."

Taylor hesitated for a moment and then replied, "I do."

"Then stay," her mother said.

Taylor blinked twice, believing she had misheard. "What?" she asked.

"Stay. I almost suspected something like this and checked with your school. It turns out they have an exchange program with the school in the Gold Coast. The school your friends are probably going to. You are enrolled as a student there for this year," Bella explained.

Taylor just stood there in astonished. This had to be a dream. She pinched herself in the cheek, but she didn't wake up. It was real! "Thank you, mom! Thank you!" Taylor exclaimed, "I have to go tell the others! You are the best! Bye!" She ended the call before her mother could say anything and sprinted down the steps back to the patio. Slamming the door open, she found not only Rachel, Amber, Sarah and Emily, but the mermaids' families. "You won't believe it! I can stay! I'm going to be attending school with you!" Taylor exclaimed.

The four mermaids stared at her for a moment and then jumped up, cheering. They hugged each other in joy. Then however Taylor caught Emma's and Ash's face. Taylor freed herself from the embrace and stepped towards them. "That is, if I am allowed to stay here," she said carefully.

"Of course you are. You are free to stay here as long as you want," Emma smiled.

Just then James came out. "What is with all the commotion about?" he asked.

"Great news, James. Taylor is going to stay and go to school with us," Emily told him.

"That's great. I look forward to it," James replied, seemingly nonchalant, but Taylor saw the twinkle in his eyes and the millimeter that his lips twitched upward for a moment. He was just as happy that she was staying as she was herself.

Rachel also noticed it and simply thought, "I'm happy for you."

The next day the girls got together their stuff for school, for Taylor it was simply a bag with a pen and paper in it, since she

didn't have any school supplies yet and would have to go shopping that afternoon. After meeting up beforehand the girls now stood at the school gate.

"So this is your school," Taylor murmured, her look sliding over the building and the crowd that had gathered before it.

"Don't worry. Everyone is really nice," Rachel assured her.

"Almost everyone," Amber corrected her in a dark voice.

Before anyone could ask what Amber meant with that, a voice said, "Hello girls." The girls turned to face Heath. "And here I thought I would have a good school year," Amber retorted, "Listen Heath. Nothing has changed since last year, in fact nothing ever will."

"Relax. I realized that you won't leave Jordan any time soon," Heath smiled, "However, if you do ever leave him, give me a call, baby."

Amber was about to retort something, when Heath's eyes fell on Taylor. "Hello," he said, eying her, "Why don't you introduce us, Amber?"

Amber's hand was starting to clench, but Sarah grabbed it, silently telling her friend he was not worth the effort. "This is our friend Taylor. She's an exchange student from Ireland. Taylor, this is Heath," Sarah introduced them.

"It's nice to meet you," Taylor said.

"So, Taylor, are you single?" Heath asked, slyly.

"Sorry to disappoint you, but I have a boyfriend," Taylor answered.

"And there is no way you would give him up for a piece of me?" Heath inquired.

"No, sorry," Taylor replied.

"We should get going to homeroom or we'll be late," Emily interrupted them and the girls quickly followed her.

"You never told us you had a boyfriend," Sarah said as they sat down in homeroom. Rachel waited curiously to see what Taylor would say.

"I don't have one, but it seemed nicer like that than turning him down without reason," Taylor lied, "Besides he's not really my type."

"Whose type is he?" Amber asked.

"I'm sure he will find a girl that appreciates his character," Taylor answered as she saw him take a seat a few chairs away.

The girls fell silent when Mr. Martin entered the classroom. The science teacher would be their homeroom teacher once more, which

pleased them. "First of all I would like to welcome you back to a new school year. I hope you all had a great vacation," the teacher greeted them, "Also I would like to introduce a new student. She is an exchange student from Ireland. Please welcome Taylor." The class gave an echo of hellos. "Seeing you guys are also all in my science class, I will inform you now that our first topic will be Marin biology. Due to that we will go out on a ship tomorrow to collect samples of plants and fish. This is mandatory," Mr. Martin continued. The group of mermaids froze. Why did they have such horrible luck? The bell rang signaling the end of homeroom. "I hope you will all be prepared tomorrow and that we will meet at the docks. Class dismissed," Mr. Martin told them.

After having gone shopping that afternoon, the girls sat in a café, talking. "So what do we do? We can hardly go on that ship," Sarah asked.

"But we don't have a choice. We can hardly fail science too. Gym is already a hassle," Emily answered.

"Why don't we just skip the trip tomorrow?" Amber suggested.

"All five of us? Won't that seem a little suspicious?" Taylor questioned.

"What if we do go?" Rachel hypothesized.

"Knowing our luck we would be hit by a spray of water and transform in front of everyone," Amber retorted.

"Well, since it is a research ship it must have a lab. What if we just stay there the whole time the boat is moving?" Rachel inquired.

"But what about our sample? We can't get into the water," Emily reminded her.

"You can't, but I can," Rachel pointed out, "I won't transform. I doubt so many people from one group have to go looking for something. If I get the sample, we have one and we can analyze it. Problem solved."

"That's brilliant," Taylor said.

"It's settled then?" Sarah asked and all the other girls nodded.

The next morning the five girls stood at the docks surrounded by their classmates. The water was flat as a pin and everything seemed calm. Mr. Martin was nowhere to be seen. "Too bad. He isn't here. Lets go," Amber joked, but just then he emerged out of a ship that was docked before them, along with a scientist in a white lab coat.

"Good morning class. I'm glad to see that everyone found the way. This is a good friend from college days, Dr. Alder. He is a renowned Marin Biologist," Mr. Martin introduced them.

"Well, I'm not for formal stuff, so I say we go onto the boat and set sail," the man said and led the class onto the ship.

After a short tour they stopped in the lab. It was a large room filled with various instruments, test tubes and other stuff. "This is amazing," Rachel gasped.

"I'm glad you find a liking to it," the scientist said, coming up behind her.

"Okay, class. We're almost at the site where you can go diving. This site is not as deep as other parts so everyone should be able to reach the bottom. You are supposed to find something that we can later examine and over the course of the year figure out what it is," Mr. Martin explained, "The designated divers follow Dr. Alder to the changing rooms."

"That's me. Got to go," Rachel said, leaving the lab.

A while later everyone got together at the back of the boat, where the divers would dive down from. "Now I've already explained to the divers how they do it, so you're ready to go. Jim over here is an expert diver, so he will help anyone, who has a problem," Dr. Alder told everyone, motioning towards his assistant.

Rachel walked over to the girls in a wet suit. "Any requests?" Rachel asked.

"Don't stick out," Amber suggested.

"Very funny," Rachel replied.

"We're fine with anything," Emily told her and Rachel nodded.

"Hey Taylor, why aren't you diving?" Heath asked, suddenly appearing out of nowhere.

"We only need one and Rachel has the most experience," Taylor answered.

"Too bad. I think you would look much nicer in that wet suit," Heath said, "Come on, Rachel. Looks like we're up."

Indeed the two adults were waving for the divers to come to them. "Wish me luck," Rachel smiled before leaving her friends.

"I hope she'll be alright," Sarah muttered, watching Rachel get into the water.

"She'll be fine," Emily assured her, "Besides, it's not we could go." All four mermaids had to nod to that.

Meanwhile Rachel slowly submerged underwater. The feeling of an air tank on her back annoyed her. How could normal people dive like this? There was no freedom whatsoever. Not to mention the pure oxygen took some getting used to. Rachel thought she would have had fun, but like this it was just horrible. Looking around to make sure no one was watching, she took one last deep breath and pulled her mouth piece out. Better. She knew she couldn't take off the air tank, so this was the most relief she could get.

Swimming like a mermaid, she quickly got to the bottom of the ocean, where she let her eyes wander. There were many fragments of shells

and plants, but one thing caught her eye. It was a scale. A bronze scale, which reminded her a lot of a mermaid's one. Having made her choice, Rachel put the scale in a small sample box and slowly made her way back to the surface. Shortly before she broke the surface, she remembered to put in the mouth piece.

Back above she was greeted by an astonished Dr. Alder and Mr. Martin. "You're back very quickly, Rachel," Mr. Martin told her.

"Well, I've dived before so I'm used to it," Rachel replied, which wasn't even a lie, sort of.

"You found a good specimen?" the teacher asked and Rachel nodded, showing him the scale, "Very interesting. I don't recall ever seeing a scale like this." Rachel simply shrugged as she took off the air tank and gave it to Dr. Alder.

The four mermaids came up to the group to look as well. They stared. "That looks a lot like a...", Emily began, softly, but stopped herself. The girls nodded.

"But it isn't," Rachel assured them.

"Rachel," Dr. Adler called her.

"What is it?" Rachel asked.

"Something seems to be wrong with your air tank. The display says that barely any oxygen was used," the scientist told her.

Rachel felt panic rise inside her. She had forgotten that there was a needle, which showed the amount of oxygen. "Maybe the display is broken," she suggested.

"Maybe," he muttered, but then more divers came up, distracting him.

The girls stared at Rachel. "You try breathing that air. It's horrible," she told them.

A while later everyone was back in the lab. On a table stood the gathered specimens. "Well, it seems everyone was able to find something, some very interesting ones at that," Dr. Alder added, "You are now allowed to use some of these instruments to make some preliminary examinations. What the!" Suddenly the ship lurched sideways, causing everyone to fall down.

"What is going on?" Mr. Martin asked as everyone crowded the portholes. What they saw made them gasp. Around them waves were crashing against the boat. This wouldn't be strange, if the sky wasn't a bright blue and the ocean in the distance as calm as could be.

"Don't worry. We're probably over some underwater air compartment which set itself free. It'll be over with soon," Dr. Alder told them.

The five mermaids however knew better. Carefully they made their way to the door, undetected by the others. "The person is trying to capsize the ship," Emily said.

"If they succeed, everyone is in big trouble," Taylor added.

"But we can't just leave. They'll notice us," Sarah objected.

"What's more important? Our secret or their lives?" Amber asked.

Rachel, who had said nothing until now, spoke up, "Go. I'll cover for you."

"Are you sure?" Emily inquired.

"Go. I can't help you there," Rachel repeated. The four mermaids nodded and hurried off.

Outside a wind was blowing hard as well. "So what do we do?" Taylor asked, but another wave collided with the side of the boat, sending the four overboard.

Surfacing next to the boat, Sarah said, "I can feel the magic. We have to stop it."

"I'll stop the propeller before it pulls us in," Taylor added and they submerged again. While Amber, Sarah and Emily each raised their hands and activated their powers to oppose the unknown magic, Taylor swam around the ship to the propeller, which was spinning at an accelerated pace, but not moving the ship at all. Taylor used her magic to solidify the water around the propeller, freezing it in its place. With a smile Taylor returned to the rest. They were trying their best to keep the water calm, but it still brought waves crashing against the ship every once in a while. Looking down, she thought she saw a shadow. After blinking it was gone. Her eyes must be playing tricks on her, Taylor thought with a shrug and added her power to the others.

Meanwhile Rachel stared out the window worried. "Hey Rachel," Heath said, making her turn around, "Where are the others?"

That made everyone look up, realizing that four people were gone. "Bathroom," she replied, curtly.

"All four of them?" he inquired, doubtfully.

"We're girls, we do that," Rachel retorted.

"And why didn't you go?" Heath asked.

"Because I didn't have to go," Rachel snapped, "I'll go look for them."

"Rachel wait!" Mr. Martin call after her, but she didn't hear him and a moment later the ship rocked once more, making it impossible for anyone to follow.

Standing at the railing, Rachel could feel the magical conflict below. She could even feel, which magic belonged to who. She reached her hand out towards the water and activated her power. "Take it. It might not be much, but take it," she whispered. Suddenly the enemy

magic gave way. Immediately the boat stopped rocking. "What the," Rachel muttered, surprised, but then she saw the four mermaids surface at the back of the boat.

"You did it," Rachel called as she hurried to them.

"It was strange. Their power just stopped. As though it was trying to say, I've had enough for today," Sarah said.

"We don't have time for this. We have to get out of the water," Emily reminded them.

Rachel nodded and reached her hand out to Amber. Pulling her up, Rachel grunted, "Why are you so heavy?"

"It's not my fault the tail weighs a ton," Amber retorted. Together they pulled out Emily and Taylor next.

Just as they were going to pull out Sarah, they heard people coming on deck. "Hurry," Sarah hissed as she was roughly pulled aboard, grazing several scales off her tail in the process, "Ouch."

"No time for an apology," Amber said as she quickly dried them.

A moment after they had transformed back, the others appeared before them. "So this is where you went," Mr. Martin said, coming up to them, "Why did you leave the lab? You could have been injured. Or worse swept from the boat." While he kept on ranting, Rachel noticed that Sarah's scales were laying on the deck. Carefully she used her foot to wipe them off the boat. One however got stuck under a nail. Pretending to tie her shoe, Rachel knelt down and plucked it from its place. Seeing it would be too obvious to throw away, she put it in a sample jar that she had kept from before. Then Rachel straightened herself again.

"I guess we won't be able to do anymore test on your samples, but if you would be so kind to help me clean up my lab a bit, I would appreciate it," Dr. Alder said. The class agreed and they went back to the lab.

Starting to pick things up, Rachel found their sample on the floor. Luckily it was undamaged. She placed it next to Sarah's scale on the right and then went back to picking up more jars. Looking up, Rachel saw Dr. Alder holding one of the jars. "Which one did you take?" Rachel asked as panic rose up inside her.

"The right one," the scientist answered and Rachel sighed with relief. Quickly she pocketed Sarah's scale before anything else could happen to it.

They soon arrived on dry land again and were allowed to go home. "I really don't understand the person who's attacking us. First they attack and then they suddenly disappear. Not to mention what happened with Rachel and her mom," Amber huffed.

"We aren't getting any closer to him or her, either. He's flawless so far," Sarah pointed out.

"They'll have to slip up one of these days and then we'll get him," Emily assured them, "Even if today was a close shave for us."

"

Speaking of which, I have a scale of yours, Sarah," Rachel told them, producing it from her pocket, "Do you want it?"

"As much as that is my flesh, no thanks," Sarah replied and Rachel placed it back in her pocket with a shrug.

"Do you think the person just wants to expose us?" Emily suggested.

"But what would they gain from that? They're a mermaid too, right?" Amber objected.

Taylor walked silently next to them. Had that shadow really been part of her imagination? Maybe, but what if not? Could it be? No, it couldn't be. She shook her head and went on.

A/N: That was a close call for Rachel. Again the objective of the enemy is blurred and Taylor finds herself staying in Australia. Which means she stays with her friends, but also with James. What could this revelation bring? Please review.

8. Concussion

A/N: Happy New Year everyone! Hope everyone had wonderful holidays. Sadly for me it's off to school soon. Thanks to all who are reading. Here is chapter 8. Enjoy!

CelticH20 Thank you for pointing that out to me. I changed it. I appreciate an attentive reader.
>

Kat Yes they do know they're mermaids. They found out towards the end of the first story.
>

******_Previously...** Taylor was allowed to stay at the Gold Coast longer by her mom. Now all five are back in school and the first excursion took place. While on a boat collecting ocean samples the boat is attacked by waves. Luckily they were able to stop it before anyone got hurt. Meanwhile James' and Taylor's relationship is under strain. Now on to the chapter.
>

Chapter 8: Concussion

Taylor stared out at the ocean. She had finally been able to find some alone time. While Rachel was at the science club, Sarah, Amber and Emily had decided to take a walk with their boyfriends. When they had asked her, if it was alright, Taylor had more than willingly let them go. Now she sat on the beach, enjoying the solitude. Back in Ireland she hadn't had many friends, making this completely new territory. It was exhausting and at the same time so much fun, but most of all it was a web of lies. She was lying to James about being a mermaid, to the others about James and so much more. If anything was ever found out, would they ever forgive her?

"What are you sulking about?" someone asked. Looking up, Taylor saw

James coming up to her.

"Nothing. Everything is fine," Taylor lied as he sat down next to her.

"How did you ever get rid of the others?" he questioned.

"Emily and the others are walking with their boyfriends," Taylor answered.

"And you didn't think of calling me?" James inquired. Disappointment was laced into his voice. Taylor cursed herself. Of course it was only natural that a boyfriend would want to be with his girlfriend as much as possible. It just showed how new she was at the whole concept.

"Sorry. I just wanted to be alone for a bit," Taylor explained, "It's all just a lot to take in."

Instead of the expected reprimand, James wrapped his arm around her and pulled her closer. "It's okay," he murmured into her hair. Taylor closed her eyes, enjoying the moment that she could feel his chest rise and fall.

Silently they sat there together, simply relishing in each others' company. Taylor inhaled his scent as she leaned, eyes closed, against him. Then he tilted her head up and leaned in to kiss her. Willingly stretched her neck towards him. Suddenly she had the feeling of being watched and Taylor snapped her eyes back open. Cautiously she scanned the ocean, but she could only see a ripple. "Something wrong?" James asked, startled by her abrupt movement. She simply shook her head, though she was more than sure that someone had been watching them, but who?

"So what do you say we go for a swim?" James suggested.

"I'm not prepared for a swim. I don't have a bathing suit with me," Taylor objected.

"We don't really have to go swimming. Just splash around and such," James explained and then added, when she still hesitated, "Or we could just go for a walk along the beach."

"Like I already said I went here to be alone," Taylor told him, carefully, trying to say it in a way that didn't hurt his feelings, but how exactly do you say something like that.

"I get it," James muttered and got up, "I'll see you later."

Watching James leave, Taylor felt like just those words, those sort of icy words, could rip her heart out. She hated herself for lying. It made her wonder how long she would be able to keep up with all these lies. If her lies weren't exposed by action, she would soon expose herself, just to feel better. Even if that meant the cost of many things that were dear and precious to her. She sighed. Why had things ended up like this? Taylor got up, staring at the ocean.

"Earth to Taylor!" someone shouted, making the blonde flinch due to

the volume.

Turning around, Taylor came face to face with Rachel. "Rachel. You nearly gave me a heart attack."

"Sorry. I called so many times, but you didn't hear me," Rachel replied, "What's up? You seemed down."

"It's all just too much," Taylor admitted, "James, the others, simply everything. I've wondered so many times what would happen, if I just told everyone the truth."

"Though I obviously can't tell you how Emily would react, I can only tell you that you should do what you feel is the best for you," Rachel told her as she watched her friend, who said nothing, "It's really bothering you, isn't it?" Taylor nodded. "Then I hope you will find the answer soon," Rachel whispered.

"I just wish that I could at least explain to James why I'm so distant, not only of the water, but him as well."

"Just wait. Fate has a strange way of making things happen," Rachel told her, "God knows that's why you're here in the first place."

Taylor had to chuckle. "Thanks, Rachel. What are you doing here anyway?" Taylor asked.

"Science club ended. I was on my way home when I saw you," Rachel answered, "Listen, I spoke with Mr. Martin. He said that Dr. Alder would be giving him the samples soon, so we should soon be able to start in science class with them. I can't wait to find out what that scale really is."

"You really love science, don't you?" Taylor questioned and Rachel simply smiled.

Just then Taylor's phone rang. "Helloâ€¦ Oh, hey you guysâ€¦ You ditched your boyfriends already?â€¦ Rachel is with meâ€¦ Sure, we'll see you thereâ€¦ Bye," Taylor said before she hung up and looked at the brunette, " That was Sarah. It seems the three finished their dates and they asked us, if we would want to meet them at the promenade. I accepted on your behalf."

"Then lets go," Rachel replied and the two walked to their destination.

A short while later the two found the others standing at the beginning of the promenade. "That was a fast date," Rachel remarked with a smirk.

"The guys still had stuff to do," Sarah explained.

"Lets hope it doesn't include seeing another girl," Taylor joked.

"They wouldn't dare mess with mermaids," Amber said in a threatening voice, which made them all laugh.

"So what's the plan?" Taylor asked.

"Stroll the promenade, do some shopping, some ice cream perhaps," Emily listed. The five mermaids all nodded and began down the walkway. Like they had agreed shopped and later got ice cream.

After they were finished they walked down the beach on their way home. They had come to a fairly secluded part of the beach, where usually you found teenagers and such hung out, playing in the water or sunbathing. Now there were a few groups around, but it was not as crowded as it usually was. The five chatted away as they walked by.

A bit ahead Taylor spotted James with some of his friends in the water and her stomach twisted in knots as their eyes met. Even though she was too far away to be able to read his features, she knew that James was disappointed in her. She wouldn't go to the beach with him, but it was a different matter with his sister. Quickly Taylor turned to look at the ocean. "Everything alright?" Sarah asked, noticing her friend's behavior.

"Everything's fine," Taylor answered, waving her off. They kept walking.

Even though Taylor continued to stare out at the ocean, it wasn't until a shrill shriek that any of them noticed that something was wrong. They looked up to see a girl their age, struggling to stay on her feet, even though she was only up to her knees in the water. "Take my hand," Rachel instructed and the girl grabbed a hold with a vice that Rachel feared that her circulation would be cut off.

With a lot of effort Rachel was able to pull the girl out, who fell into her arms. "Thank you," she sobbed.

"What happened?" Emily asked.

"The current suddenly became really strong and started to pull me under," the girl explained and then ran off to her friends, who quickly fled the beach. The girls turned their attention to the ocean. Though they couldn't see the current, they could see that several people had problems keeping upright, even in shallow water.

"Everyone get out of the water and get away from the beach!" Emily commanded as people, who were either on the beach or could free themselves from the flow, sprinted for the street. What was left were two or three people stuck in the water.

"Rachel, pull them out while we try to stop the current," Sarah said and Rachel nodded, hurrying towards the closest person. The other four mermaids raised their hands and activated their magic, which they used to grasp the water. They could feel the force of the other user and they pulled back and forth, almost as though the water were a tug-o-war rope.

Rachel was able to release two of the three captives and was heading for the last one, when Taylor looked over to see, if James was still there. What she saw stopped her heart. He was treading water, only his head still perceptible. However he seemed to be doing okay. Yet, shouldn't she tell the others so they could save him too, if he didn't make it. Taylor looked over to the others, but they were busy

and then back to James. Or where he had been. Now only his splashing hands were still visible and then nothing at all. Horrified, without a second thought, Taylor dropped her magic and jumped into the water, zooming towards him. Quickly she saw James thrashing about, trying to get back to the surface, but the current, that was pulling him under, was too strong. She swam to him and grabbed his shoulder, trying to pull him up against the will of the current.

Suddenly a horrible shot through her head as one of his flailing arms made contact with her temple. Everything went dark for a moment and when she opened her eyes she saw James sinking deeper and deeper below her, but it was clear that he had barely an oxygen left. Despite her protesting head, Taylor dove after him and was finally able to grab a hold of him, just as the last of his breath escaped him. With the last of her energy Taylor began pulling James to shore. Halfway to the surface the tide seemed to weaken and then stop completely. Finally she was able to break the surface and pull him ashore. Luckily everyone had fled the beach and so no one was here.

"James, James, wake up," Taylor said, terrified, softly slapping his cheek, but got no reaction and then even checked, if he was breathing, "No, you can't be..." Carefully she tilted back his head and opened his mouth. Taylor pressed her lips to James' and started giving CPR. "Please be alright," she prayed as tried to reanimate him. It seemed like hours, but then James sputtered and the water came out of his mouth. He started to breath again. "Thank god," she whispered, leaning back.

"Taylor!" Rachel, Sarah, Emily and Amber exclaimed as they hurried up to her.

"Oh my god James!" Emily cried out when she saw her brother on the ground, not moving.

"Don't worry. He'll be fine," Taylor told her.

"Thank you, Taylor," Emily sighed as she sank to the ground with relief, "I would hug you, but you knowâ€¦"

Taylor nodded. "You stopped the water?" she asked.

"It suddenly just stopped and then we made sure that everyone was gone, in case another attack comes. That's when we saw you," Amber explained.

Just then James began to stir. "Quick. Into the water," Sarah hissed and Taylor dove in just before he opened his eyes.

"What happened?" he muttered.

"You were pulled under by a strong current," Amber explained.

"How do you feel?" Emily asked.

"Fine, considering," James answered and then looked around, "Where is Taylor? I thought I saw her with you earlier."

The four girls stared at each other. "I'm calling mom. She's going to drive you to the hospital to get a check up," Emily interrupted him

as she pulled out her phone and stepped away to call her parents.

After a few minutes Emma and Ash arrived, anxious, but happy that their son was alive. While Ash helped James into the car, Emma stayed behind. "Taylor," she said and the mermaid appeared at the surface, "Thank you so much. You saved him. You can stay at our house as long as you want."

"It was nothing," Taylor replied and then Emma turned to hurry back to the car.

"We should get you back to normal before anyone shows up here," Rachel said and Taylor nodded.

"Leave it to me," Amber added as she balled her fist. As Taylor started to dry, the pain, which had been present in her head pretty bad, exploded, making her clutch her head. Immediately Amber stopped her magic. "Are you alright? Did I hurt you?" Amber asked, horrified.

"No! It's just! My head hurts," Taylor muttered, "James hit me by accident while I rescued him."

"Could it be you have a concussion," Sarah suggested, worried.

"Then we shouldn't move you, let alone turn you back into a human," Emily objected.

"It's not like I can stay a mermaid the whole time," Taylor retorted.

"I agree. She can't stay like this," Rachel agreed.

"Should I do it slowly or fast?" Amber asked.

"Just get it over with," Taylor told her and Amber nodded. Quickly Amber balled her fist and Taylor instantly felt how she was drying and that her head erupted in pain again, but then it subsided after she had transformed.

"You alright?" Rachel asked and Taylor nodded.

"Can you stand?" Emily questioned, "You should get to bed as soon as possible." Taylor tried to push herself up, but her head protested too much.

"Maybe if we cool it a bit," Sarah suggested and Emily nodded. Gingerly Emily placed her hands on Taylor's temples and a moment later Taylor felt a smoothing cold wash over her head, dulling the throbbing.

"Thanks," Taylor muttered as Emily released her grip.

"We should get you to a hospital as well," Rachel suggested.

"That's not necessary," Taylor waved them off, "Besides it's too dangerous with all the water there."

"Well, Lewis should still look at you," Sarah insisted, "He's not a

doctor, but as a scientist he knows enough to know how to proceed." Taylor reluctantly gave in and let herself be helped up.

The walk home was a long and tasking one. More than once did they have to stop to cool Taylor's head, but finally they made it. Sarah had called ahead and thus Lewis and Cleo were already waiting at Emily's house when they arrived. They quickly ushered Taylor into a chair. After Lewis had examined her, he told everyone, "Good news. It's only a light concussion as far as I can tell. However you should still rest for a few days. It was a good idea to cool her head with your magic."

"I'll bring you to bed," Cleo said. The pregnant woman carefully helped Taylor up and together they made their way slowly upstairs. Once there Taylor immediately fell asleep as soon as her head hit the pillow.

She woke up with a start when she realized that someone had entered her room, but not without her head protesting. When she looked up she saw James. Before she could say anything, he asked, "I heard you got a concussion. How are you?"

"Better now," Taylor answered, "How about you? Emily told me you nearly drowned."

"Yeah, it was pretty close," James agreed, but then paused for a second, "Actually that's why I wanted to talk to you." Taylor nodded, slightly, but didn't say anything. "Back when the current was pulling me under, I thought I saw something coming towards me. I saw you, but you didn't have legs. You had a tail. You were a mermaid," James told her.

Taylor stared at him horrified. What now? Should she just own up or deny it all? "That's just ridiculous. You were drowning. Your imagination was going haywire," Taylor objected with a laugh.

"And yet you don't go into the water. Where did you get your concussion from?" James demanded to know.

"If you must know, while everyone was fleeing the beach, someone knocked into me and I fell against a tree," Taylor lied.

Before either one could say anything, the door opened and Emily came in. "Is everything okay in here?" she asked, her eyes first on Taylor and then her brother.

"Yeah, everything is fine," James answered and turned to leave, "I was just seeing how Taylor was doing." With that he left.

"Is that true?" Emily inquired, "I thought I heard fighting."

"No. I just told him how I got a concussion, that's all," Taylor replied.

Emily nodded and then told her, "It's already pretty late. I came here to bring you some soup." In silence Emily watched Taylor eat her soup and then cool her head once more. "Don't worry about school tomorrow. We'll excuse you. Rest," Emily said as she quietly closed the door.

Taylor closed her eyes and pretend to go to sleep. However it was impossible. James knew what she was. What was she supposed to do? Pretend it never happened and move on? Taylor mulled it over in her head until the throbbing became unbearable and exhaustion finally caught up with her. She fell into a unruly sleep with a weird dream.

When she woke up the sun was shining into her room and it was almost noon. Taylor took a sip of water from a glass that was next to her on a nightstand beside another bowl of soup. However she wasn't hungry and decided to save it for later. It was already cold either way.

"So you're finally awake," a voice said, making her head snap around, but not without a sharp pain going through it. Opening her eyes from the pain, her gaze fell on James. She backed up a bit, startled and at the same time for a safe distance between them. Something about him scared her.

"Where is Emily?" Taylor asked, stammering, trying to get his mind on something else.

"At school," James replied, "And mom is out shopping." So no one was home, except for them. Now Taylor was scared.

They sat their in silence for a while and then James said, "I know what you are, Taylor. Don't deny it."

"And I still say you're crazy. There is no such thing as mermaids," Taylor retorted.

"But it would all fit with you, wouldn't it? That's why you don't go into the ocean," he accused her.

"I am just not a fan of water," Taylor objected.

"Would you stop lying already," James demanded and with that grabbed the glass and poured its content all over Taylor.

Taylor froze, but then her head exploded in pain as she transformed into a mermaid. When she looked up at James, she saw that he was shocked, completely speechless. "What? Isn't this what you expected?" Taylor asked, but when he still didn't say anything added, "Say something. Anything."

"I'm sorry," he whispered, "I guess even though I thought it was true, I still can't really believe it, even though I see it before me. How did this happen?"

With a sigh Taylor began to tell her story. Of course with a bit of editing. Once again she held back the fact that she was adopted and that the other four were mermaids. She had met Emily online and they had come visit her. After she had finished retelling her story, James stared at her for a moment. "So my sister and her friends know nothing about all this?" he concluded.

"Yes," Taylor replied, "And I would prefer it, if it stayed that way."

James leaned over to her and smiled, "You're secret is safe with me."

With that he bend over and kissed her. "Get well soon, my little mermaid," he whispered and then left.

Taylor stared at the door for a while longer after it was closed again. It felt like a huge burden had been lifted from her shoulders. She had finally owned up to one lie and it had turned out alright, but at the same time several others took its place. Now she was lying to James about the others not being mermaids and to the others that James didn't know what she was. However at the moment she didn't care. Her heart was skipping with joy.

"Fate has strange ways of making things happen, huh," Taylor muttered with a smile.

****A/N: ****The secret is out. At least part of it is. Will Taylor be able to keep up the facades of her lies? What will happen with the sample that Rachel got from the ocean? Please review.

9. Sample

****A/N: ****School really is brutal, but I'm back with a new chapter. Thanks goes out to all my readers. Here is chapter 9. Enjoy!******

Previously... After their science trip with Dr. Alder, Taylor was having more and more trouble keeping her mermaid half from James. Then James got caught in a wave, Taylor rescues him, but acquiring a concussion in the process. James also finds out she is a mermaid and confronts her. Taylor admits it and there love is stronger than ever. Now on to the chapter.
>

Chapter 9: Sample

Carefully Rachel washed the test tubes, while the rest of the science club members cleared away other things. They were just about finished for the day and the only thing left to do was to tidy things up. When they had finished, Rachel grabbed her bag and was about to follow the rest out when Mr. Martin came in. "Rachel, would you stay back for a moment," Mr. Martin said and she nodded, unsure of what he wanted.

"What is it?" Rachel asked.

"Don't worry. You're not in trouble," he assured her, "Someone wishes to meet you." Meet her? Now Rachel was really curious.

Turning around, she saw Dr. Alder enter the science room. "Hello Rachel," Dr. Alder greeted her, reaching his hand out to her.

"Dr. Alder. It's a pleasure to see you again," Rachel smiled, shaking his hand.

"The pleasure is all mine," he replied as Mr. Martin left the room to give them some privacy.

"What can I do for you?" Rachel asked, "You surely didn't take time out of your busy schedule just to say hi to me." "

You really are smart, Rachel. I like that," Dr. Alder told her, making Rachel blush, slightly, "You're right. I came here to ask you where you got that scale from." Rachel's heart stopped. What was going on? He had the normal fish scale, right?

"It's a normal scale. What does it matter?" Rachel inquired.

"I'll tell you this in the confidence that you won't tell anyone. That scale turns to human flesh when it is dry and changes back when it is touched by water," the scientist explained. The world seemed to be spinning and Rachel had to grab a hold of a table to steady herself. So he had taken Sarah's scale by accident. Dr. Alder gave her a worried look, but said nothing.

"I found it at the bottom of the ocean, remember," Rachel lied.

"Don't lie to me, Rachel. I know that is not true. In the lab you had two specimen jars, but you only brought one back up," Alder retorted.

"I got it from the ocean," Rachel repeated, "I found two and wanted to keep one, so I only showed you one of them."

There was a long silence and Rachel debated on whether or not just to grab her stuff and go. Just as she had decided to do that, Dr. Alder asked, "Do you intend to work the scientific field?"

"What?" Rachel replied, confused at what the question had to do with anything.

"Do you intend to become a scientist?" he repeated.

"It would be a dream come true," Rachel answered.

"If you work with me, I can open doors for you that you didn't even know existed," Dr. Alder told her, "However if you work against me— Well let's say you won't ever get a job as a scientist." Rachel stared at him astonished. He couldn't do that, could he? It took all of her control not to make a faucet explode behind him, knowing it would only prove his suspicions about her.

"Good day, Dr. Alder," Rachel finally said through clenched teeth, grabbed her bag and left.

In the hallway she ran into Mr. Martin. "Ah, Rachel. You done talking with Dr. Alder already?" he asked, "What did he want?"

"He just asked me something about where I found the scale," Rachel answered, trying to sound as nonchalant as possible, "I didn't know anything though. See you tomorrow, Mr. Martin." Quickly Rachel continued walking. She didn't want to be in the same building as that scientist anymore. Not to mention there was something she had to check on.

As Rachel went past her locker she quickly opened it and pulled out the small jar with the sample in it. She had hoped to possibly do an experiment or two on Sarah's scale and to be of help like that to the real mermaids, but she hadn't had the chance to do so inconspicuously. Now she cursed herself for not having at least

checked that she really had the right scale. Checking to make sure that no one was watching, Rachel dumped the water into a fountain and balled her fist. "Please," she begged, "Please, turn into flesh." Smoke was starting to rise from the scale, but still nothing happened. Suddenly it caught fire and Rachel dropped it, stomping it out. It was definitely a normal scale.

As she carefully scooped up the remains of the scale, despair started to consume Rachel. However it quickly turned into rage. "Damn it!" Rachel yelled as she slammed her hand against the row of lockers so hard that she knew it would turn black and blue later. Her anger vented, Rachel slid down the lockers to the ground. As she sat there it hit her. The others. They were in trouble now. Dr. Alder wasn't dumb. If he figured out that it wasn't from her then it had to be from someone close to her. Slowly Rachel got up and walked towards the exit of the school. It shamed her. Her attempt to help her friends had turned into the exact opposite. Something far more dangerous. How was she supposed to tell them this?

Rachel didn't need to call any of her friends to know where they were. Single minded she walked the streets, not once wavering on her path. Finally she stopped in front of Emily's house. After ringing, Emma opened the door. With a nod Rachel greeted her and then walked upstairs where she knew that she would find her friends. Opening the door, she was met with the innocent faces of her four friends. Their happy faces made Rachel feel even worse.

"Hey," they greeted her.

"Hey," Rachel replied as she walked up to them, "How are you, Taylor?"

The blonde that had gotten a concussion saving her boyfriend a few days ago smiled back, "Besides being bored to tears fine. Though I think I can go to school again tomorrow."

"You might want to put that off for a while," Rachel muttered, nervously, "All of you for that matter"

The four mermaids stared at her. "What do you mean?" Amber asked.

"Is something the matter? You seem weird," Sarah added.

Rachel stared from one to the next and finally took a deep breath. "Remember how I kept that scale from you, Sarah? Well, Dr. Alder sort of got his hands on it and confronted me about it today."

For a moment the room was silent, the words that had been said slowly sinking in and then all hell broke loose. "What!" Sarah, Amber and Emily exclaimed, followed by many questions all muddled into one large ball of shouts. It only stopped when they saw that Taylor was holding her head. "Sorry," they whispered.

"What happened?" Taylor asked, calmly. So Rachel explained. How she had kept Sarah's scale from being seen, over when Dr. Alder must have taken the wrong one by mistake, all the way to how he showed up in school, making her realize her mistake. The four mermaids silently listened to their friend's telling, not interrupting her once.

"I'm really sorry," Rachel finished, "Had I known he had gotten his hands on the scale, I would have done something about it."

"We know," Sarah said, "We know you would never endanger us on purpose."

"It was just a shock," Emily added.

"Are you sure that he took the right one by accident?" Amber asked, making everyone look up, "It sure seems like a pretty big coincidence that he just happens to choose Sarah's scale in all the commotion."

"Actually I have been wondering that myself. Even if he did take the scale, the only way he would have found out was by examining it," Rachel admitted, "Why would a renowned scientist look at the samples some class found?"

"You think there is more to it?" Taylor inquired.

"We'll find out," Rachel assured them.

"Shouldn't we get our sample back tomorrow?" Emily asked, "We are supposed to work with it."

"Let's worry about that later. I'm hungry," Amber said.

"Good idea. Let's make something," Sarah replied.

"I'll come too," Taylor smiled.

"No, you're not," Emily retorted, "You shouldn't stress yourself."

"Coming downstairs and eating is strenuous?" Taylor asked, "Come on. I can use my powers almost pain free again. I'm fine."

"Fine, but we'll come get you once it's done. Rest until then," Emily gave in.

"Don't worry. We should be done in about 20 minutes," Sarah assured her as they got up and left.

Taylor flopped back into her pillow. She hated being confined to this room, especially now that she was feeling better. Growing restless as the days accumulated, Taylor knew there was really only one reason why she hadn't already just left. Just then there was a knock on the door. Her reason. James peeked into her room and smiled at her when he saw that she was alone. His visits had been more frequent and longer now that she had had to stay home while the rest of the family had to work or go to school. Often they talked, especially about mermaids, now that he knew about her. That was definitely a plus. She didn't have to lie to him. That much.

After he kissed her, James asked, "How are you?"

"Good," Taylor answered, "I think I'll go back to school tomorrow."

"You hate my company that much?" James questioned, playing the

hurt.

"I love your company. I just hate the inactive part about it," Taylor smiled.

"Fine, I'll overlook it," James gave in, "Under one condition?"

"Which?" Rachel asked.

"You show me your powers and transform," James listed. Taylor understood the request. Due to her concussion anything having to do with magic had been out of the question, since it had been too painful. James had agreed to wait until she was better before she showed him.

Taylor nodded as she turned to a glass of water on her night stand and activated her powers. A pang of pain went through her head, but she ignored it. It was definitely nothing compared to the pain she had felt only a few days ago. She nodded and James picked up the glass. "Amazing," he gasped as he held it above his head, "It's jelly."

"You shouldn't do that. It'llâ€¦," Taylor began, but her warning came too late as the jelly turned back into water, dumping itself all over James as well as a few drops on Taylor, "Sorry. I only transformed it for a moment, but, hey, I'm going to transform." Just as she said that she transformed. This time the pain was more intense, but again bearable.

James just stared down at her. "Beautiful," he finally whispered, "You're beautiful."

"You're exaggerating," Taylor replied, "You saw me before remember?"

"Well, it's a bit different when you see a mermaid and you're drowning," James said.

"You should get going through," Taylor told him, "They're going to get me for lunch soon." With a scowl James gave Taylor a quick kiss before heading out again.

Only a few seconds later Taylor already heard footsteps coming up the stairs. Cursing Taylor maneuvered her tail under the blanket and pulling it all the way to her chin. How was she going to explain this? The door opened and Rachel came in. Silently Taylor let out a sigh of relief. Had it been any of the others the explanation would have been a lot harder to give.

Rachel immediately noticed what was going on. "Why are you a mermaid?" Rachel asked, but then answered the question herself, "So you finally told James?"

"Well, actually he found out during the waves," Taylor answered.

"Wow, you don't get to talk for a few days and this happens," Rachel muttered, sitting down on Taylor's bed.

"Well, it's not like we were ever really alone," Taylor replied and Rachel just shrugged, nodding.

"So how is he taking it?" Rachel asked.

"Amazingly well," Taylor told her, "But how about we get some food? I'm pretty sure the others are waiting. Especially Amber." The two friends laughed as Rachel used her powers to dry her. With a stabbing pain Taylor transformed back and they went down to eat.

The following day the five girls sat anxiously in science class. Taylor had gone back to school, even though Emily had said it might be too early, and had simply called her a mother hen. Just then Mr. Martin walked in, the samples in tow. "Good morning class," he greeted them, "As you can see we'll start working on your samples that you collected a while back. I have a big surprise."

In walked Dr. Alder. "What is he doing here?" Rachel asked, a bit too loudly so that Mr. Martin overheard it and Rachel blushed, "It's just doesn't Dr. Alder have a lot of work to do himself?"

"Took some time out of my schedule to be here. I find it important to sponsor young talent," Dr. Alder explained.

"I see," Rachel muttered, trying to keep her dislike for the guy in check.

"Anyway, come up, get your samples and start with the experiments like instructed," Mr. Martin told them. Rachel volunteered to get it and walked up to the teacher's desk. As she grabbed her small jar, she eyes Dr. Alder, who simply smiled at her as though nothing was wrong. Was he just going to let her take it? Then again he had little other choice, if he wanted to remain inconspicuous.

The lesson went without any interruption. Amazingly enough Dr. Alder kept his distance and showed no more interest in the mermaids' group than he did to the others. Rachel kept an eye on him, but nothing seemed out of the ordinary. At the end of the class, she asked, "Mr. Martin, can I take the sample home? I'd like to do my own experiment on it, if that's alright with you." That had to make Dr. Alder force his hand, if he didn't want to lose possession of the scale.

"That's fine. I know you won't do anything stupid with it," Mr. Martin answered. With that Rachel packed the sample and followed her friends out of the classroom. Dr. Alder remained silent.

The rest of the school day went by and the five sat in Sarah's backyard. "I can't believe he just let us walk out with it," Taylor said, "We sure are lucky."

"Nothing he could do. He can't seem suspicious," Sarah replied with a shrug.

"But didn't you find that too easy?" Amber asked.

"Why? He could hardly not give us our sample," Emily answered.

"Still, I agree with Amber. It was too easy. He didn't as much as flinch when I asked to take the scale," Rachel told them.

"Maybe you should be less suspicious," Sarah said.

"Or maybe you should be more suspicious," Amber retorted, "Rachel, hand it to me." Silently Rachel handed it to the blond, who just placed it on the ground in front of her. Slowly she balled her fist. The five girls stared at the scale, waiting for it to turn back into flesh. Suddenly it burst into flame. "I'm guessing this isn't our scale," Amber said the small fire died down.

"So he gave us a decoy?" Sarah asked.

"No wonder he was so calm," Emily muttered, "He had the real one all along."

"Rachel?" Taylor asked, seeing her friend's shaking figure, suddenly she jumped up, "What are you doing?"

"I'm going to visit him," Rachel told her.

"Then let us come along," Sarah insisted.

"No way. If he goes around splashing water, there is no way to keep all this a secret," Rachel retorted, "I have to go alone."

Emily simply nodded, while Amber said, firmly, "Let us at least follow you in the water. We'll stay out of the way, but if you get into trouble we can save you. I don't trust that creep." Rachel nodded curtly and hurried off, while her friends ran to the water.

"You should stay here, Taylor," Emily said.

"And let you face that maniac alone?" Taylor retorted, "No way. I'm coming along." Emily nodded and they jumped into the water.

A while later Rachel reached the docks where Dr. Alder kept his boat, which was also his lab. Rachel couldn't see her friends, but she guessed that that was the point. She didn't bother with knocking or other pleasantries and just entered. Remembering the way from last time, she quickly found the lab, where Dr. Alder was bent over a microscope. "Dr. Alder," Rachel said, making him look up. He didn't seem surprised to see her.

"I expected you here soon," was all he replied.

"You gave us a decoy," Rachel told him, stepping closer, her rage apparent.

"Did I?" he asked, acting surprised, "Silly me."

"Give it back to me," Rachel ordered, "What will that one scale get you? One whose origin you don't even know." "Lots. This is a revolution. Imagine what would happen, if I actually find people with such DNA," Dr. Alder told her. Only now did Rachel look at what he was doing. On the wall was a picture of DNA, which made her breath get caught in her throat. A few years ago out of love to science and curiosity, she had made a picture of her own DNA. It matched.

"You stole my DNA!" she exclaimed. Dr. Alder said nothing. How? Then

it came to Rachel. She had seen him walk past her seat several times that afternoon. It would have been easy to take her DNA. Not just hers for that matter. "You took all of our DNA," Rachel whispered, horrified. What if he had already checked the others?

"So far I have only finished your DNA," Dr. Alder told her, as though he was reading her mind, "It confirmed my suspicion that it wasn't your DNA. However I am more than a hundred percent sure that one of your little group has this DNA."

Suddenly the ship began rocking side to side. "The others," Rachel remembered. She wasn't alone. "Dr. Alder, you don't want to make me your enemy," she warned him.

Quickly he took two strides, covering the distance between them and pinned her to a counter. Rachel tried to free herself, but he was too strong. "Are you sure you should be threatening me? I think I might be a too big of a fish to fry," he growled into her ear, "Now why don't you do us both a favor and tell me who's DNA it is? You'll have a job for life in the field of science."

"Never," Rachel spat.

Abruptly another wave hit the boat, this time so hard that it sent Dr. Alder flying off Rachel. With a groan he got up. "Is this your doing?" he asked, staring at her.

Before Rachel could do anything, a fire burst to life next to the microscope, quickly spreading throughout the whole cabin. "We have to get out of here," Rachel said, covering her mouth. Already the smoke was thick and dark.

"Not without my research," Dr. Alder replied, trying to grab something.

Rachel grabbed his arm, pulling him back. No matter how much she hated him right now, she couldn't let him die. "Lets go," Rachel repeated and pulled him behind her. With the fire hot on their trail, they ran for the exit.

Just as the fire consumed the whole ship, they reached the dock. Dr. Alder sunk to the ground, staring at the flaming wreck. Already people were coming closer and cell phones were being whipped out. "My work," Dr. Alder stammered.

"This is your final warning," Rachel told him in a grave voice, "You try to research this again and you won't be as fortunate next time. If you know what's good for you, this was all just an accident. A lot worse can be done." Without waiting for a reply, Rachel turned on her heel and left, weaving through the crowd.

Rachel walked a bit, making sure that no one was following her, before she headed towards the beach. There she only had to wait a moment before four heads rose out of the water. "Are you alright?" Taylor asked, worried.

"I'm fine," Rachel answered, "Though you wouldn't need to worry, if Amber hadn't overdone it."

"I'm innocent. I didn't use my powers, let alone start the fire,"

Amber protested, "You honestly think I would take into account that you could be injured just so that I could get at that idiot?"

"It's true, Rachel. I rocked the boat a bit, but none of the others did anything," Sarah told her.

"But where did the fire come from?" Rachel asked, confused, though glad it hadn't been Amber.

"Maybe the rocking caused a short-circuit?" Emily suggested.

"Maybe," Rachel muttered, still not convinced. Taylor looked thoughtful, but said nothing.

"Do you think he'll leave us alone?" Sarah inquired.

"Only time will tell, but I feel confident that we aren't in anymore danger," Rachel replied and they smiled.

****A/N: ****With one villain down, the girls dodged a serious bullet, leaving their bond stronger than ever. What could tear them apart? Perhaps a turmoil from inside? Please review.

10. Downpour

****A/N:** I got some big exams coming up, so I'm really glad I was able to upload. I hope my studying didn't interfere with my writing quality too much. Thank you to all my readers. Here is chapter 10. Enjoy! ******

Previously... Dr. Alder accidentally gotten his hands on Sarah's DNA and tried to force Rachel to tell him, who it's from. During the confrontation between the two, someone starts a fire, destroying everything. Meanwhile Taylor tells Rachel that she had James are together. Now on to the chapter.
>

Chapter 10: Downpour

"I think it's about time we call it quits for today," Amber yawned, leaning back onto her hands as she looked at the clock in Emily's room, which read almost ten pm. The others nodded in agreement. They had been working on a project for school and homework almost all afternoon and into the night.

"I should definitely get going. My mom won't be pleased to have me wandering the streets so late at night," Rachel said as she packed her things. The other four waved after her as she left.

"I know I live only next door, but frankly I'm too tired to go home," Amber told them.

"Me too. That was way too much homework for my taste," Sarah agreed.

"Then why don't you just stay over?" Emily suggested as she got up and went to her closet. There neatly put away in a box she found Sarah's and Amber's sleepover things. After they had several

inconveniences about forgotten stuff or not being able to have a spur of the moment sleepover, each girl had given the other two a stack of stuff that they would need, if they ever stayed over.

"Agreed," the two chorused.

"Then call your parents while Taylor and I get everything ready," Emily told them.

While Amber and Sarah got out their cell phones, Taylor and Emily went to Taylor's room where there were sleeping bags in the closet. Each took one and headed back. As they past James' door, Taylor stopped, her mind wandering to him. What was he up to right now? Wait for her? Since their relationship was still a secret, they often met at night in of their rooms. They talked, sometime kissed. Though it did have its risks. More than once someone had come in and one of them had to hide quickly. It wasn't ideal, but better than nothing. A small smile blossomed on her face.

Just then Emily's head poked out of her door and asked, "Everything alright?" Taylor quickly nodded and hurried to bring the sleeping bag. They talked a while as they set of the beds, but were forced to stop when Emily reminded them that it was a school day tomorrow and, if she didn't go to bed soon, they would be tired in the morning, so reluctantly the four split up to go to bed.

Taylor had just returned to her room and was about to undress, when a voice said, "I thought you would never finish." Startled she whirled around to see James getting up from behind her bed. Self consciously she held her arms in front of her chest, even though she was still clothed.

"What are you doing here?" Taylor asked, slowly starting to recover from her shock.

"What's it look like?" James replied as he sat down on her bed, "Waiting for you. It was a close call though. I was barely able to duck behind the bed when you and Emily came in."

Taylor shook her head as she let out a slow breath. "You're impossible," she muttered as she sank down onto the bed beside him. James took a hold of her face and drew her in for a kiss. "How good it felt," Taylor thought as they slung their arms around each other.

When they finally broke their kiss, they just snuggled together, talking. They talked about all sorts of things, though usually they somehow got onto the topic of mermaids, a subject James always seemed to have new questions on. "How did you ever survive in Ireland as a mermaid?" James asked, "I mean with all the rain and such?"

"Not sure myself," Taylor replied with a shrug.

"You think there are other mermaids beside you somewhere out there in the world?" James inquired.

"Yeah, there are. Your sister and her friends," Taylor wanted to say, but only thought it. "Who knows? I have yet to find another moon pool and back in Ireland it seemed I was the onlyâ€¦," Taylor began, but abruptly stopped. Suddenly she shoved James off the bed,

James was about to complain, when he heard the door open. "You're still awake?" a voice asked. His sister!

"Yeah," Taylor answered, looking around the room for a reason and then her gaze fell on her laptop, which rested on her desk, "I was chatting with my mom."

"I see. I saw that your light was still on and found it strange. You're usually one of the first to fall asleep," Emily told her, "That reminds me. I wanted to talk to you about the full moon that will be in a while."

Taylor froze. If this continued James would find out the truth about Emily. "Let's talk about it tomorrow. I'm pretty tired," Taylor suggested and more than rudely ushered Emily out of her room, "Good night." Before Emily could reply, Taylor had closed her door.

"Why does my sister want to talk about the full moon with you?" James asked, looking at her.

"Please, don't look at me like that," Taylor thought, guiltily as she tried to convince herself this was the right thing to do. "For a science project," Taylor answered, "You should go though. I really am tired." James nodded, seeming to accept the answer and gave Taylor one last kiss. After James had left, Taylor changed and went to bed.

As Taylor got up the next morning, she smiled. Another day full of sun. That was the best part of the Gold Coast, thought the girl, which had only a while ago only known the gloomy Irish weather. Her sixth sense, or possibly an attribute that mermaids got when they were often exposed to such rainy weather, hadn't once gone off since she had arrived in Australia, as opposed to the almost daily basis it went off in Ireland. It was a nice change of pace to not have to worry about the rain.

Still with a big smile on her face Taylor stepped to the window to gaze upon the sunrise over the ocean, a phenomenon, which she had noticed pretty quickly after taking up the room and had now become part of her daily routine. With great anticipation Taylor pulled aside the curtain, but instead of the expected glistening water, the foaming waves and the magically painted sky, there was the looming clouds, the almost pitch black ocean and an obvious patter, which she knew all too well. Rain. No, a downpour. The drops came down like threads, never once letting up.

Confused Taylor stared out at the scene in front of her. Was her sixth sense broken? Could it break? She wasn't feeling any rain. Slowly it dawned on her. This wasn't good. Taylor hurried out of her room and down the stair, where she heard muttering from. In the kitchen she found not only her three fellow mermaids, but also Emma. "Was this in the forecast?" Emily asked.

"There is no way we can go out there," Sarah said, leaning against the window.

"Not unless we want to turn into mermaids the second we step outside," Amber added.

"It's strange though. I don't think any rain was expected," Emma said.

Taylor used this moment to speak up, "There wasn't. This rain isn't natural. Something or someone is causing this. My sixth sense says it shouldn't be raining."

The four looked at her. "So you mean whoever saved Rachel from Dr. Alder is now making it rain?" Emily concluded.

"But why?" Sarah questioned.

"Keep us from going to school," Amber suggested, "Now all that homework was for nothing."

"Let me try my magic," Sarah said as she raised her hand towards the sky. The girls could see the tension in the brunette's face, but then gasp and told them with a shake of the head, "No chance. It won't budge."

Just then James came downstairs. "It sure is raining," he commented, "Shouldn't you get ready for school?"

"School? You want us to swim there?" Emily asked.

"Since when do you miss school due to any reason?" James replied, eying his sister, "I'll drive you, if that's the problem."

"I don't think that's a good idea, James. Some roads are already under water. It's too dangerous. They'll stay here," Emily objected, "We'll just have to wait out the storm." The five children nodded, solemnly.

Hours past, but no change in the weather seemed to be coming. The rain hadn't lessened, in fact it might have gotten stronger. Worried they watched the water rise. "If this keeps up, soon the ocean will come up to our house," Emily pointed out.

Suddenly there was a knock on the glass door, a figure dressed in a raincoat stood there. "Rachel," the girls muttered as Emma carefully opened the door.

"What are you doing here?" Taylor asked, "Are you crazy going out in that storm?"

"Why don't we first get her some towels to dry off," Emma suggested, seeing the girl was drenched from head to toe, even though she was wearing a rain jacket and carrying an umbrella. James went off to get the towels.

"I didn't have much of a choice. My house is in a small ditch and was starting to get flooded. My mom and I left. I wanted to know how you were, so I told her to go ahead," Rachel explained, careful to keep a safe distance from the mermaids.

Just then James came back and handed Rachel the towels, who tried to dry herself to the best of her abilities. "Why don't you and I go upstairs and get you dried up," Amber suggested and Rachel nodded, understanding what the blond meant. The two left.

"I wonder how bad it is out there?" Sarah muttered, staring out the window.

"I'm sure Rachel will tell us," Taylor replied.

A moment later Amber and Rachel, who was now completely dry, returned. James stared at them. How was it possible to dry that fast? Not to mention he hadn't heard a hairdryer running.

"How bad is it out there?" Emily asked as they settled on the sofa.

"Very bad. A lot of the streets are flooded and houses are threatening to sink. I took my boat here. If this continues, the whole city will have to be evacuated," Rachel told them. Angrily Amber balled her fist, but careful not to use magic.

"Perhaps we should go look for higher ground," Emma suggested.

"No, we should be fine here," James replied, making everyone look up, surprised. Nervously Taylor bit her lip. Don't blow it, James.

"Can I talk to you in private?" Rachel asked, eying her mermaid friends, and the others nodded, moving into the kitchen, where she whispered, "This isn't natural, is it?" They all shook their heads. "We need to do something," Rachel told them, "Due to the rain a flash flood is starting to come. If this keeps up thousands could be in danger."

"Why would that person threaten all those humans, if it's after us?" Emily questioned.

"I don't know, but it doesn't matter. We are the only ones who can do anything," Rachel retorted.

"I agree with Rachel. Lets show that shadow what we can do," Amber agreed.

"What could you possibly do?" someone suddenly asked, making the girls turn in horror. In the doorway stood James. Taylor stared at the scene. This was not good.

"Nothing," Emily answered, quickly, "We were just being silly. Forget what you just heard."

"Didn't sound like it," James said, "What could you possible do unless you're mermaids?" All three of the original mermaids stared at James, while Taylor wasn't sure what to do and Rachel felt like she had landed in the middle of a soap.

"How do you know about mermaids?" Emily finally stammered.

"Is it true?" James repeated, firmly and then his gaze fell on his girlfriend, "Taylor?"

Now the girls stared at Taylor, who fidgeted uncomfortably. "What is he talking about Taylor?" Sarah asked.

"I'm so sorry, James," Taylor finally whispered, "But it wasn't my secret to tell."

"Wellâ€¦ That explainsâ€¦," James stammered, speechless as he slowly sank into a chair, overwhelmed at the fact that his sister was now suddenly a mermaid, "A lot."

"What is going on here?" Amber demanded to know.

"James saw me when I saved him and confronted me about it," Taylor explained, her head low, "I told him the truth, but I didn't tell him you were also mermaids."

There was an awkward silence. "Lets talk about this later. Right now we have to save everyone," Emily said and Taylor smiled gratefully.

"Let me help," Rachel told them.

"No way. It's too dangerous for you," Amber retorted, "Not to mention you won't be able to fight the current."

"Please, Rachel, find higher ground with out parents and watch that nothing happens to them. I, no, we all would feel better, knowing our families are save," Sarah begged, thinking of Cleo, who was highly pregnant.

"Okay," Rachel gave in and stepped back.

"Lets go," Emily said.

"You are not going!" James ordered them, jumping up from his chair and grabbing his sister's wrist, "It's far too dangerous."

"We can handle ourselves," Emily retorted, staring back at him, "We have faced worse than this."

"Still. You should not have to do this alone," James objected.

"James, please. We know what we're doing and I promise we'll all come back safe and sound," Taylor told him, making him look at her. James clenched his fist and looked to the side vanquished. In silence the four mermaids stepped to the door. In one clean motion Emily threw open the door and they sprinted into the rain, mentally counting the seconds until their transformation. In the last second they dove into the water, their tails visible as they went under.

James stared out at the spot where they had disappeared. "Let the girls be, James," Emma said, coming up to him and resting a hand on his shoulder, "They know what they're doing."

"Mom," he muttered, looking at her as it dawned on him, "You knew?"

"A long story. I'll tell you more while we go to higher ground," Emma replied, "For now you should know that those girls already saved the world twice."

"And my life," Rachel added, stepping beside them. For a moment they stared out at the rising water, thinking of the girls, before they hurried to the boat, Rachel had brought with her, collect the others

and then find higher ground.

Meanwhile four mermaids were now on a main street, which during normal days was almost never empty, but now not a soul dared cross it. The water had risen so high that the mermaids could easily swim over the street. "I know we told James we would stop this, but how?" Amber asked, letting some rain fall into her extended hand, "I mean Sarah wasn't able to do anything and what are we supposed to do against all this water?"

"There must be a place where it has a weakness," Taylor said.

"If so, I don't feel it," Sarah replied, being the most magically aware.

"But there has to be something like the center of the storm. Even a magically induced one has to have one. A place where it all comes from," Emily objected.

"Well, there is a spot where there is slightly more magic than the rest of the Gold Coast," Sarah pointed out, "Follow me."

The three followed Sarah out into the ocean. When they stopped, they noticed it wasn't raining as hard. "So where is our bad guy?" Amber asked, looking around.

"Try stopping it here," Taylor suggested.

"I still wouldn't be able to do it. It's too strong. I would need a lot more magic," Sarah objected.

"Take ours," Emily said, "We can't disappoint the others."

"Would that work?" Amber questioned.

"Why not? We all have our powers from a moon pool, so it can't be too different. Plus we have merged our powers before, just outside of our bodies," Taylor pointed out.

"Let's give it a try," Sarah agreed.

The others nodded and all three placed their hands on Sarah's back. She closed her eyes and could feel her friends', not just physically, but mentally. Their bodies felt like vessels for their magic and their arms the connection to her. Although Sarah didn't know who stood where behind her, she just knew. Their magic defined them. Amber's fiery hot red magic, Emily's cool white magic, Taylor's elastic blue magic and her own almost fluid purple magic. Sarah could feel their magic streaming from her friends into herself, as though they were becoming one.

Slowly Sarah raised her hand towards the sky and activated her power. She could feel their magic colliding, the rain sometimes lessening, sometimes getting stronger. "I won't let you, whoever you maybe, hurt my friends, my family or anyone on the Gold Coast. No one!" Sarah thought with those last words send out a powerful surge of magic. It almost sounded like a flash of lightning when the two powers met, but instantly Sarah knew they had won as the rain stopped and the clouds burst apart, sending a ray of sun to shine down on them. She felt her friends' retreating and quickly said, "Keep them there a moment

longer. I need to fix this." When the hands stayed on her back, Sarah used one swift motion to push all the clouds away and to slowly, so that nothing more would be damaged, pull the excessive water from the city. The masses of it, which she pulled out, amazed her.

As Sarah drained the last of the water, she sighed, "It's over."

Suddenly she felt three pairs of arms hug her. "Good job," her friends smiled.

"That felt really weird," Amber said.

"What did you expect?" Emily asked.

"I don't know, but it almost felt like I understood you better than ever," Sarah answered and the others nodded.

"So what now?" Taylor questioned.

"The city will probably still be in alert mode, so maybe it would be better, if we laid low and went to the moon pool," Emily suggested, "At least for a while and it would give us time to talk." The others nodded.

So once they had arrived at the moon pool, Taylor retold of how James had found out, of course omitting the fact that they were together and that Rachel had known anything, since she didn't want her to get in trouble. Luckily no one seemed to be mad at her for not telling them and were almost happy that Taylor had tried to keep their secret, even though she had been busted. They had only been there for a bit when they suddenly heard people entering the moon pool.

The mermaids were about to dive under when Rachel appeared in the entrance followed by James. "Told you they would be here. If they didn't return home, they're here," Rachel said and gave her friends a thumbs up, "Great job, you guys. All the water is gone. Now only some repairs will be necessary."

Meanwhile James just stared at his sister and the three other mermaids. "This is really happening," he muttered in disbelief.

"How much does he know?" Emily asked, motioning towards her brother.

"Your mom told him everything," Rachel answered.

"Then he knows he only barely escaped getting a mermaid, sorry, merman tail," Amber grinned.

"Don't remind me," James groaned, "I mean it looks good on you, but I don't think it's for me."

"Aw, I think you wouldn't look bad with a tail," Sarah smirked.

"Come on, we'll show you what you missed out on," Rachel told him, jumped into the water and dove away. Emily, Sarah and Amber followed suite.

Taylor was about to follow as well, when James grabbed her arm. "So this was your secret?" he asked, "Why didn't you tell me?"

"It wasn't my secret to tell," Taylor repeated, "If Emily didn't want to say anything, then I can't go behind her back."

"And what about us?" he questioned, "Are we going to tell them?"

"I think one surprise is enough for one day. I still don't think it's a good idea to tell Emily," Taylor admitted.

Before James could say anything, Emily resurfaced. "Come on, you two lazybones. The water feels great," she smiled, splashing it at them. With a laugh Taylor pulled James into the water and after her into the wide ocean.

****A/N: ****The girls were able to not only overcome the downpour, but also the fact that James now knows of their secret. However they also realized that whoever is after them is not afraid to hurt innocent people in the process. What happens when it strikes closer to home? Please review.

11. New Way

****A/N: ****My exams are over and I did the best I could. Can't ask more from myself, right? Anyway I now have vacation and hope to catch up on stuff that I had little time for in the last month or so, including writing, of course. So I might be able to update soon than usual. Anyway thanks for reading. Here is chapter 11. Enjoy!**

Italics stand for flashback.

Previously... James was getting closer to figuring out the truth about his sister when a mysterious downpour strikes the Gold Coast. Overhearing a conversation he confronts them and the girls confess. The girls then stop the downpour, which luckily no one was hurt by. Still Taylor and James keep their love a secret however. Now on to the chapter.

Chapter 11: New Way

"I'm sick and tired of this!" Amber yelled, jumping up from her chair at the counter in Sarah's house.

"I know how you feel, but I don't think this is a good idea," Emily retorted, calmly looking at her friend.

"Do you? If you did, then you would want to do this too," Amber objected.

"We do understand you, but isn't what you're suggesting risky?" Taylor pointed out.

"We have to think of the consequences," Rachel added.

"Think about it Amber. If we go and hunt down what or whoever is after us, then won't we be playing right into their cards," Sarah

told her, "Plus we would be endangering all our families, if we enrage them."

"But we can beat it. We saw that. In the direct battle during the downpour we won," Amber pointed out.

"Well, theoretically yes, but practically you have to also calculate in that the person had been using their power for some time since then, thus making him stronger than us," Emily protested.

Amber sighed and took a few steps away from her friends before turning around and asking, "So we should wait until the person really does drown the whole Gold Coast or kill us? I'm sick and tired of always running away and just reacting. What if we took the offensive? What if we did something completely out of character? We could take that thing by surprise and use that to our advantage."

The four girls stared at their friend for a moment when Cleo entered the kitchen, shopping bags in hand. Instantly Sarah jumped up and took the bags from her. "Mom, you know you're supposed to be taking it easy," Sarah said.

"Don't you start treating me like I'm about to break in two any second too," Cleo replied, resting a hand on her round stomach, "Lewis, fussing over me is more than enough. If it were up to him, he would probably chain me to the bed until the baby is here."

In silent agreement the mermaids got the rest of the groceries. As the girls unpacked and stored the groceries, Rachel asked, "So when is the baby do?"

"In a bit more than a week," Cleo answered.

"And you really have no idea what it will be?" Taylor questioned, "I would die of curiosity."

"No idea. Lewis and mom want it to be a surprise," Sarah smiled.

"Though by the way the baby is moving so much I would guess a boy," Cleo replied, rubbing her stomach.

"Or an energetic girl," Amber added.

"It would be interesting to say the least," Emily pointed out, "If she would be able to turn into a mermaid."

"I think getting born into this family is whacky enough, but becoming a mermaid too might be a bit much," Sarah objected, "Not to mention theoretically mom doesn't have the mermaid genes anymore, I do

"Either way I will love him or her," Cleo smiled, "But I couldn't help overhearing what you were discussing. You want to lure the person out, who is attacking you?"

"Amber wants to," Emily retorted, eying her friend.

"What do you think, mom?" Sarah asked.

"Well, back in the day I wasn't known for taking risks, but I have to say maybe it's worth a shot. We never really tried to turn the table on our pursuers back then. It would interest me to know what happens. Maybe, like Amber said you could finally end this," Cleo told them. The girls stared at the former mermaid, not having expected this answer. "But you should still be careful," Cleo warned them, "I would even help, if youâ€¦"

"Thanks, but no, mom," Sarah interrupted, "Lewis would have my head, if I let you help us."

"This is what I have to put up with," Cleo complained, "Fine, I'll condemn myself to beach walks and staying at home. Speaking of which, I think I'll go for one right now."

"You go on walks often?" Emily questioned.

"Yes. There is not much else to do and the baby seems to enjoy hearing the ocean," Cleo answered, "Can I give you one last piece of advice? If you are going to use the trap, do it soon. The full moon is upon us in a few days." With that she left. The girls waited for a moment as they listened to Cleo leaving and then turned to one another.

"She's right. If we're going to lure it in, it should be soon, tomorrow even. So how do we lure whoever is following us out?" Emily asked, looking at her friends.

* * *

><p>"Come on," Rachel said as she stepped into the cave, turning around. Alex followed her with a picnic basket in hand.<p>

"I didn't think you were serious when you suggested having a picnic at Mako. It seems like a weird spot," he told her as he looked around, "Then again it is pretty nice. Quiet and relaxing."

"I told you this is the perfect spot for a picnic," Rachel replied as she and Alex spread out a blanket, "Okay, in truth I got the tip from Sarah's mom. She and Lewis used to come here all the time back in the day."

"I heard she was pregnant. How is she doing?" Alex asked.

"Good, except for the part where Lewis and Sarah are fussing over everything she does," Rachel smiled.

"And how are you doing? Especially with that new girl from Ireland? Taylor, was it?" Alex inquired.

"I'm fine. I've gotten used to using the necklace for magic. I have to admit I was jealous of Taylor in the beginning, but now we've become pretty good friends actually," Rachel answered, "But enough about me. What about you? How have you been?"

"You know the usual. Keeping up with school, missing you every second, wishing that we could see each other more often," he said as he leaned in closer. Just as they were about to kiss, the sand suddenly began to whirl, creating a twister around them. "What's going on?" Alex asked, trying to make his voice heard above the

wind.

"I don't know," Rachel replied as she leaned against Alex for protection. With a smile Rachel thought back.

_"She's right. If we're going to lure it in, it should be soon, tomorrow even. So how do we lure whoever is following us out?" Emily asked, looking at her friends. _

_"Walk around town until he, she or it attacks us?" Sarah proposed. _

"Well, we know whoever is after us has something to do with mermaids. What if we used the one place that is sacred to all mermaid related people?" Amber suggested.

_ "The moon pool," Taylor said and the others nodded. _

_"But there is no way that the person will come out, if we all go to the moon pool," Rachel objected. _

_"We're not all going," Amber replied. _

_"Wait. You want one of us to play the scapegoat? That's way too dangerous," Sarah objected. _

_"Not if we plan it right. Obviously only the person will think that one of us is alone. We'll have secretly taken up positions around the moon pool, ready to capture whoever tries to go after our bait," Amber explained. _

"You're serious about this," Emily realized.

_ "Of course. After what happened I don't want to see people die. I already nearly did kill someone. It's not a pleasant feeling," Amber replied as she shuddered at the memory of the boy in the hospital._

"How come you always borrow my homework, if you come up with such elaborate plans?" Emily asked, trying to ease the seriousness and the gloom that was overcoming Amber.

Amber smiled at her friend, "Because if I did my homework, I wouldn't be that smart. You have to be that smart to have other people do your homework and to only think about the stuff that's important." The two smiled at each other.

_"So who's going to be the bait?" Taylor asked, trying to get them back on track. _

_"I'll do it. They must be angry at me for ruining their plan of sinking the Gold Coast. If anyone can get them out of hiding, it's me," Sarah volunteered__, raising her hand slightly as though she was trying to be picked by a teacher__. Amber, Emily and Taylor nodded at the logic of their friend. _

_"No, it should be me," Rachel objected. _

_"Why do you say that?" Amber questioned, looking at her. _

"No way, you can't defend yourself efficiently against what we're up," Emily protested. _

"Listen to me," Rachel began, a pleading look in her eyes, "If Sarah, any of you for that matter, are the bait, that's one less person to corner them with. There is little I can do to stop them as you said yourself." The four mermaids couldn't help but agree with that argument. "Plus," Rachel continued, "They'll be less suspicious of me. Like you said yourself I'm an easy target and wouldn't be able to defend myself properly. There is no way he would see a trap in it."_

For a moment the girls were silent, debating with themselves their course of action. Finally Emily spoke, "Okay, you'll be the bait, but don't take any unnecessary risks. You're alone there." _

"Who said I would go alone?" Rachel smiled as the others stared at her confused, "Alex is coming to visit tomorrow. I'm sure he'll gladly help us." _

"You sure he'll agree to it?" Taylor inquired, surprised.

_

"Positive. He'll do anything to help us," Rachel answered__,
_"__I'll pick him up and then our trap is perfect.__"_

Though the sandstorm Rachel eyed the water, scanning every inch for their attacker. Then she saw it. A dark shadow just below the entrance to the moon pool. "There it is!" Rachel exclaimed, pointing to the shadow. Out from the entrance of the cave sprang Emily and Amber and dove into the pool. Almost instantly the twisted stopped and the shadow vanished into the underwater cavern. Rachel and Alex scrambled to the opening, trying to see something of what was going on below.

Underwater the way to the ocean was dark and it was hard to see anything. Amber and Emily looked around, trying to find the figure. Just then Sarah and Taylor swam up to them. With a shrug and a shaking of the head, they signaled that no one had passed them. Their prey was still here. Carefully they let themselves sink towards the ground, the only hiding spot in the area. Suddenly a tentacle shot from the darkness below, barely missing Amber. Knowing the general direction of the figure, the girls sank lower in a faster pace.

* * *

><p>"Can you see anything?" Rachel asked, leaning over the edge of the moon pool.<p>

"No more than you," Alex answered.

"Wait, something is coming," Rachel said and a split second later the tentacle broke the surface. Before either of them could react, the tentacle wrapped itself around Rachel's arm and pulled her under.

"Rachel!" Alex exclaimed, but could do nothing more than watch as his girlfriend was pulled under.

Startled all four mermaids saw as Rachel was pulled under. Struggling

against her restraint and to get to the surface, she hit the tentacle, but it didn't effect it.

The figure took their moment of distraction to flee, making the tentacle follow with Rachel, who had to be careful that she didn't hit her head in the process. The four mermaids followed quickly. Out in the ocean the figure picked up speed and zoomed away, while the tentacle pulled Rachel further under. She had given up her struggle and now pressed her hands against her mouth.

Conflicted the four mermaids weren't sure what to do. Get their attacker or save Rachel. With a nod the two groups from earlier split up again. While Amber and Emily raced after the figure, who was only a dark spot in the horizon, Sarah and Taylor followed Rachel. Meanwhile Rachel could feel her breath getting short. She pressed her hands against her mouth as though it might keep the air inside of her. Her vision was slowly filling with spots, but she could see Sarah and Taylor coming towards her. Don't save me. Go after the figure, she wanted to say, but couldn't.

Sarah activated her magic to try and unravel the tentacle, but the magic didn't work as the tentacle kept pulling Rachel further and further down. Taylor saw that Rachel couldn't hold on much longer and activated her power. With all the power that she had Taylor solidified the tentacle and a split second later it burst apart. Quickly Sarah grabbed Rachel and the three hurried to the surface.

As they broke the surface Rachel coughed and spat out water. "Thanks," she muttered in between coughs.

"Lets get you to shore," Sarah suggested as they pulled her to the mainland. Back on land Rachel dropped onto the sand, exhausted.

A moment later Amber and Emily surfaced as well. After Amber had dried them all off, she said, "We lost him."

"I'm sorry," Rachel replied, looking to the side.

"You have nothing to feel sorry for," Taylor objected.

"I should be the one to apologize. I nearly got you killed with my idea," Amber added.

"Watch out!" a voice suddenly exclaimed and they were able to roll to the side in time to avoid a tentacle coming down towards her. Startled the girls looked to the side to see Cleo.

"Mom!" Sarah yelled, "Get out of here! It's too dangerous!" As though the tentacle understood them, it gave up on attacking them and shot towards Cleo. The girls were helpless as they watched the pregnant woman stagger backwards in vain. Just as the tentacle reached Cleo, she dropped to the ground so that the tentacle just missed her. To the girls surprised instead of attack again, the tentacle disappeared.

Sarah waited for her mother to get up, but she didn't she worried. "Mom," she said, walking towards her, "Mom!" The five girls hurried towards Cleo. "Are you alright?" Sarah asked as she arrived next to her mother, who was still hunched over on the ground.

"My water broke," was all that Cleo could manage to say.

"Your water broke," Sarah repeated and then it slowly sank in, "Wait, doesn't that mean? Oh my god. Okay, you do your breathing, mom" and Emily

"I'm calling the ambulance right now," Emily interrupted, her phone already at her ear.

"And you need to take a deep breath and calm down," Rachel said, hooking herself into Sarah's one arm to keep her from hurrying around.

"Your mom will be just fine," Taylor added and did the same on Sarah's other side, "You should call Lewis so that he's at the hospital when she arrives."

Sarah nodded as she pulled out her phone and dialed Lewis' number. "Lewis, it's Sarah," she said when he picked up.

"Sarah, what's up?" Lewis asked.

"Well, mom sort of went into labor just," Sarah began, but Lewis interrupted, frantically, "Is she alright? How is she doing?"

"Calm down, Lewis. Meet us at the hospital. We already called the ambulance," Sarah replied and hung up.

In the distance they could hear the sirens and a moment later the ambulance arrived. Sarah glanced to her friends. "Is it alright if I go with my mom?" she asked her friends

"Go. I called my mom. She and Emma will be here soon and take us to the hospital," Amber answered, "We'll be right behind you." With a smile the four other mermaids assured their friend as she got into the ambulance along with her mom.

Only a short while later Emma and Rikki arrived each in their car and waved for the girls to come, who hurried towards them. "Rachel, everything alright?" Alex asked as he jumped from the boat that had brought them to Mako in the first place.

Rachel turned around startled. She had completely forgotten about Alex. "I'm fine," Rachel answered, "But listen I have to"

"It's alright. Go, I'll find the way back to the station on my own, but you owe me big time," Alex interrupted.

"Got it," Rachel smiled and gave him one last kiss before she followed the others to the cars, "Thanks, Alex."

With a speed, which was close to the limit and made the girls fear for their life, they quickly arrived at the hospital, where they found Sarah waiting alone. "Lewis is already inside," she greeted them.

"Then we'd better wait here," Emma suggested as she took a seat and Rikki followed suite. "Right," Rikki agreed, "No use in all piling into the room."

The time didn't want to pass as the large group sat in the hallway, waiting for a sign. As though they were taking turns, the younger girls found themselves each pacing back and forth at one point or another. Finally the door opened and a doctor came out. "And?" Sarah asked, hurrying up to him.

"Why don't you go see for yourself," he answered, but smiled at the same time. The group rushed into the small room.

Laying on a bed, slightly exhausted, was Cleo and in her arm a bundle of blue cloth. Lewis stood beside her. Cleo smiled as her friends and family entered. Sarah stopped at the foot of the bed, but was pushed forward by her friends. Carefully she looked down at the little person in her mother's arms. A sense of joy and pride filled Sarah. "Say hello to Ethan," Cleo said, shifting the baby a little closer to Sarah.

"Hey Ethan," Sarah smiled as she extended her finger, which he immediately grasped, "My name is Sarah. I'm your big sister."

"He's completely healthy," Cleo told everyone.

"Then there is nothing standing in his way to become a merman," Rikki smiled.

"Please no. There should be at least one more normal person to balance out all this craziness," Lewis replied.

"I think you'll need more than one person to accomplish that with our daughters as they are now," Emma retorted.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Amber asked, crossing her arms in front of her chest.

"You really have to ask with the stunt that we pulled today?" Emily answered.

"It nearly worked," Rachel objected with a smile and added jokingly, "It would have, if I was a real mermaid and not some sort of enhanced human."

"You did your best," Taylor replied, "Besides you're not the only wear one. I'm the only mermaid from Ireland."

"Welcome in the crazy world of mermaids, little brother," Sarah smiled and the others couldn't help but laugh as Sarah made a tentacle of water sliver in front of Ethan, which he tried to grasp, "Welcome to the crazy world."

****A/N: **Cleo and Lewis' child is born without too many complications and the girls plan of action failed. Now however the full moon is sneaking up on them. Will it be the revenge of their attacker or problems amongst themselves that will bring them trouble? Please review.**

12. Explosive

****A/N: Vacation was awesome, but as always way too short. How is it**

possible that school is back on already? Okay, enough of my complaining, I have to live with it either way and complaining about it to you won't change anything. Anyway, back on track, thanks to everyone who reads my story. ****My birthday is this month and as a present from me to you**** here is chapter 12. Enjoy!**

_Previously... Amber is tired of simply running from their hunter and is able to convince the others to hunt their hunter. However it backfires when Cleo arrives and is pulled into the drama. Her baby comes and Ethan is born. Now on to the chapter. _

Chapter 12: Explosive

Sarah stifled a yawn as she walked home from school along with her friends. Her friends looked at her as Amber asked, "You alright, Sarah? You look really bad."

"Thanks for the compliment," Sarah answered, dryly as she rubbed her eyes, which had bags underneath them, "I love Ethan and all, but waking up in the middle of the night every night because of his screaming isn't easy."

"If you would have said something, you could have stayed with us, any of us I'm sure for that matter," Emily pointed out as the rest nodded.

Sarah however shook her head, replying, "It's unfair to leave mom and Lewis to do it all themselves. Not to mention what kind of big sister would I be, if I just left when things got tough."

"You might get some sleep tonight," Taylor told her, "Remember the full moon is upon us."

"Right. Whose house are we staying at tonight?" Rachel asked, looking around the group. Although neither she nor Taylor needed to worry about the full moon, they had decided, out of solidarity, to join the three mermaids.

"My house," Emily replied, "Don't worry. Everything is ready. The good thing that came along with James knowing I'm a mermaid. No more hiding from him during the full moon or locking myself up without an explanation."

"I can imagine," Sarah smiled, "Finally I'll be able to get some sleep."

"No that would mean no fun for us," Amber complained, jokingly.

"I'll see you later then. The usual time?" Rachel questioned as she turned towards her home and the others nodded. The usual time being one hour before the rising of the full moon. With that the group dispersed, making preparations for the night.

Later that day Taylor listened from the comforts of her room to the sounds in the hall. Nothing. Emily's parents were both out of the house so that they had it for themselves during the full moon and Emily was preparing for the full moon. Seeing it posed no threat to her, Taylor had nothing really to prepare for. Carefully she opened

the door and snuck down the hall. With a knock Taylor entered James' room. James, who stood in front of his wall covered in photos, looked up and a smile spread across his face. "I'm not interrupting anything, I hope," she said, stepping up towards him.

Instead of a reply his arms wrapped around her and he gave her a kiss and only then did James reply, "You're never interrupting." He held up a hand full of photos. "I'm in the middle of updating my wall," he explained, "I just can't decide which should be hung up and which should be taken down."

Taylor looked at the pictures in his hand and answered, "I think they're all great."

"I would much rather put up a picture of you as a mermaid," James whispered into her ear.

"No way. First of all you don't have one. Second of what if one of your friends sees it?" Taylor retorted.

"I'll say it's cosplay or something," James suggested, "Or at least I want to put up this picture." He held up a picture, which she recognized instantly. It was the picture of her at the airport. The first time they had met.

"Are you crazy? If you put that up, Emily will know something is up," Taylor told him, "She'll clearly be able to tell this is the airport."

"You're no fun at all," James murmured, his arms still around her.

Just then there was a knock on the door and Emily came in. The two were barely able to separate in time before Emily saw them. "There you are, Taylor. I was looking everywhere for you," Emily said as she stepped up to them, "What are you doing here?"

The two froze for a moment before Taylor answered, "Pictures. James asked me for my opinion of what picture he should put up."

"Really? He never asked me that," Emily told her, obviously a bit hurt.

"It's just that Taylor wanted to see them and I was in a pinch, cause I couldn't decide between two," James lied.

"I see," Emily whispered.

"So what did you want from me?" Taylor asked, trying to get the blonde's mind off it.

"Right," Emily said, remembering the real reason she was even here, "Come with me." Emily took Taylor's hand and led her out of the room, so that she could simply wave good bye to James, who only smiled after her. Taylor was pulled downstairs and into the kitchen.

There on the table stood a small cake with a candle burning on top of it and surrounding the table was Amber, Sarah and Rachel. "What is going on here?" Taylor asked as Emily walked over to the rest.

"Surprise!" the four girls exclaimed.

"Haven't you realized? It's been exactly one month since you came here," Rachel told her.

"You arrived on the day of the full moon," Sarah added.

"I can't believe you remember," Taylor said, "I didn't even remember."

"Well, to be perfectly honest, we didn't either," Amber replied, "Actually it was James who reminded us." She motioned towards the entrance.

"You're welcome," James said as he stepped into the kitchen.

It took all of Taylor's restraint not to hug him. "Thanks," Taylor smiled.

"So why don't we close the rest of the curtains and enjoy this cake," Emily suggested and the rest nodded. After they had sealed up the house, so that no light had a chance of getting in from the outside they sat down at the table, the only light being from the candle.

"This kind of feels like a date," Sarah said as she ate her slice of cake.

"It would be the weirdest date I've ever been on," Amber muttered between bites. Taylor and James sat next to each other. Taylor glanced over to him, wanting to hold his hand, but that was impossible.

Emily looked at her watching and reported, "The full moon is up now. As of now no one leaves the house." The others nodded.

"I guess we finish up here and head to bed," Rachel suggested.

"You won't find me complaining," Sarah yawned as she got up, collecting the plates along the way to the dishwasher.

"Let me help," Taylor volunteered and hurried to help Sarah put them in.

Suddenly there was a gurgling sound coming from the faucet. The six teens stared at it and a second later the faucet exploded to reveal a tentacle. The tentacle lunged for Sarah and Taylor, seeing they were closest to it. "Watch out!" Taylor exclaimed as she pushed Sarah out of the way, only to be caught full on by the tentacle and flung across the room. With a crash she landed in the debris of the former sink. The tentacle seemed to freeze as Taylor slowly got to her knees before it suddenly disappeared.

The five stood there for a moment, frozen to their spots, before hurrying to Taylor's side, James making sure to have a safe distance between them, so that he would not accidentally do something that would reveal their relationship. "Are you alright?" Emily asked, crouching down beside her.

"I'm fine, I think," Taylor answered, rubbing her head as she transformed into a mermaid, "Nothing major."

"Thank god," Sarah whispered, "Thanks for saving me."

"Your arm!" Rachel suddenly exclaimed as she saw red drops fall to the ground. Blood. Indeed a long, nasty looking cut ran down Taylor's arm, where a piece of the faucet must have scratched her.

"We have to get that bandaged," James said, "Amber, dry her off." Amber was already on it, her fist balled towards Taylor's direction.

"I'llâ€¦," Emily began, but James interrupted, "I'll bandage her. You guys need to stay down here in case something happens." Emily thought for a moment and then nodded. "Can you stand?" James asked as Taylor regained her legs. Taylor nodded as she slowly got up and was then led off.

Upstairs in the bathroom James opened a cabinet and pulled out bandages. "It doesn't look that bad," he assured her as he placed gauze on the wound and then started wrapping it. In silence they just sat there for a moment. "Why did you save Sarah?" James finally asked.

"I don't know. It was a reflex," Taylor shrugged.

"Honestly...", James sighed as he finished tying the bandage, "I'm just glad you're alright." Then he kissed her, drawing her in.

"Oh my god," a whisper interrupted them. Startled they turned around to see Emily in the doorway.

"Emily, it's not what it looks like," Taylor said, getting up from her spot on the bathtub's edge.

"Really? So you were not just kissing my brother!" Emily yelled, making Taylor flinch, "How long?" The two remained silent. "How long?!" Emily demanded to know.

"We fell in love on the day that I arrived," Taylor admitted, weakly.

"I don't believe it. So you didn't just lie to me about James not knowing about your power, but that you're together," Emily concluded, angrily, "What else did you lie to me about?"

"Emily, I'm soâ€¦," Taylor began, but Emily interrupted, "Really? Cause it didn't look like you had any guilty conscious while you were kissing him." Taylor stared at the enraged Emily for a moment and then stormed past her, running downstairs.

James watched her and then walked past his sister. "Good job," he muttered sourly as he went into his room.

Sarah, Amber and Rachel, who had busied themselves by picking up the pieces of the faucet, looked up when Taylor stormed downstairs. "Taylor, are you alriâ€¦," Sarah began, but stopped when she saw Taylor hurry to the door, pull it open and leave.

"Taylor?" Amber asked, but the door was slammed shut.

"Oh no," Rachel muttered, realizing what had happened. The three just stood there, unsure of what to do.

A moment later Emily came down the stairs. "I don't believe it," Emily muttered, still angry.

"What happened?" Sarah asked, "Why did Taylor run away?"

"She is going out with James," Emily answered.

"What?" Amber questioned, astonished, "You're joking right?"

"She's been going out with James pretty much ever since she got here!" Emily yelled, "I can't believe her! She lied to me, to us, the whole time! She knows I hate lying. I want nothing to do with her anymore!"

"This is exactly why she didn't tell you," Rachel snapped, speaking up for the first time. Instantly the three mermaids' heads shot up to look at her.

"You knew?" Emily questioned, jumping towards Rachel.

"I found out by accident a while ago," Rachel answered, keeping her ground.

"How could you not tell me?" Emily inquired.

"You have to ask when you act like this? It wasn't my secret to tell," Rachel retorted, quoting her friend, "Taylor was scared that exactly this would happen, if she told you. She didn't want to put your friendship on the line. I'm going to go look for her. It's still dangerous out there. I would tell you to do the same, but you're stuck inside. I hope you use the time to think things through." With that Rachel turned on her heel and left.

Emily stared after her. "Do you think I overreacted?" she finally asked, softly as she slid down onto a chair.

"I think you might have been a bit too hard on her," Sarah rephrased it.

"I think Taylor should have told you either way," Amber objected. Emily looked from one of her friends to the other. It kind of felt like a devil and an angel that sat on her shoulder, whispering into her ear. With a sigh she rested her head in her hands.

"Taylor never had the intention of deceiving you," James said, suddenly appearing before her, "We first met by accident at the airport when she first arrived. We hit it off. When we found out who the other person really was Taylor wanted to break it off. She didn't want to risk your friendship." Emily looked at him as he told the story, her expression unreadable. "It was me who kept trying to get together with her," James continued, "Emily, I love her." With that he handed her the picture of Taylor that he had taken at the airport. Emily stared at it and then at him.

"You really love her?" she finally asked.

"More than I ever loved anyone else. I don't want anything to happen to her," James answered.

With a sigh Emily got up. "Then I can't get in your way," Emily smiled as she handed back the photograph and then turned to her friends, "Lets find her. I have someone to apologize to."

"I'll come with you," James volunteered.

"No, you can't," Emily objected as they walked to the door, "You have to stay here in case she comes back."

"But what about the full moon?" James protested.

"Taylor is more important than that. The full moon should be right overhead. If we keep our heads low, we won't have a problem," Emily retorted as she pulled her hood over her head, the other two following suit. With a wave the three left.

Outside Emily pulled her phone from her jacket and dialed Rachel's number. When she picked up, Emily asked, "Rachel, have you found Taylor yet?"

"So you got over your tantrum?" Rachel smiled, "No, sadly I haven't. Are you outside?"

"Yeah, just by my house, but I doubt we'll be of much use. We're like blind mice," Emily replied, keeping her eyes fixed on the ground.

"Get back inside. I have an idea where she might be. I promise I'll bring her to you," Rachel told them.

"No, I want to," Emily began, but suddenly only heard a scream and a moment later the line was dead.

"Emily? Emily!" Rachel exclaimed, but there was no reply, "Damn it." She picked up speed, now sprinting to the spot where, hopefully, she would find Taylor.

* * *

><p>Meanwhile Taylor had ended up on the beach, just staring out at the dark ocean. Thousands of stars shown down on her, but it didn't interest her today. The words that Emily had said still echoed in her head. Maybe she should have told her earlier, but would the reaction have been different? Taylor could only guess. It hurt being accused of lying to her so many times, but it hurt even more knowing that it was true. How she wished she could just come clean. Wouldn't that however cause even more hatred towards her?<p>

Feeling watched, Taylor's head shot up. Something was out in the ocean. Squinting her eyes, she tried to figure out what it was. "Taylor!" a voice exclaimed, making her look away. It was Rachel. "So you were here," the brunette said out of breath.

"How did you find me?" Taylor asked, surprised.

"I know you," Rachel smiled, but then it quickly disappeared, "We

have to hurry. Something has happened to the others."

"What?!" Taylor exclaimed as she jumped up. No matter how hurt she felt by Emily, how mad she might be at her, Taylor could not and would not allow a friend to get hurt. She hurried after Rachel, looking over her shoulder to the ocean one last time, but nothing was there.

Nearing Emily's house the two girls could see a small dome of water being continuously being assaulted by a tentacle. Inside the dome Emily, Amber and Sarah cowered, the strain of keeping the shield up was clearly taking a toll on Sarah. Rachel and Taylor could tell that the shield wouldn't last much longer. "Hey!" Taylor yelled, "Pick on someone your own size!" Instantly it let off on its attack and turned to her. In unison the two raised their hands and activated their power, ice and solidifying respectively. Slowly the tentacle was being iced over, turning hard.

Suddenly it shook itself, blasting all the frozen bits off, and then disappeared. They just stood there for a moment and then hurried to the three mermaids. "Are you alright?" they asked as an exhausted Sarah dropped the shield.

"We're fine," Amber replied, "Lets get inside first." Building a human chain the two led the rest to Emily's house.

Inside they sank to the ground. Finally Emily looked at Taylor and asked, "Why?"

"I couldn't let you get hurt," Taylor answered.

"But all that stuff I said to you," Emily objected.

"You were upset. I understand," Taylor retorted, "I know it wasn't right of me to lie to you, but what else should I have done?"

"I honestly don't know," Emily whispered, "I'm sorry for everything I said."

"Sorry? What should you be sorry for? You went outside during a full moon to find me, if that doesn't prove something what does?" Taylor retorted, "It should be me apologizing. If I hadn't run away, you wouldn't have gotten into such danger."

"Okay, how about you agree that you're both sorry," Amber butted in, tired of the sorry festival.

"Anyway if my brother loves you and you love my brother then go ahead. I can't stand between you," Emily told Taylor with a smile.

Taylor stared at Emily. She hadn't expected that. "Really?" she asked, stammering a bit. Emily nodded.

Just then James appeared in the hall. "Thank god you're alright," he said.

Taylor looked from Emily to James and then suddenly jumped up and kissed him. "Okay, that I don't need to see," Emily interrupted them and everyone burst out laughing. Taylor smiled up at James in his

arms.

****A/N:**** Now all the secrets are out. No more hidden lovers or untold powers. We could end the story here, if it wasn't for their attack still on the loose. Will their hunter make a mistake or will the girls continue to be the hunted? Please review.

13. Pictures

****A/N:** Sorry, I would have updated last weekend, but I had so much homework. I seriously don't get it. Schools almost over and yet the work doesn't seem to end. Anyway thanks to everyone for reading and reviewing. Here is chapter 13. Enjoy!**

Previously... The full moon was there and Emily accidentally finds out about James and Taylor. Taylor runs away after Emily yells at her, but comes back in time to save the mermaids from another tentacle assault. Emily gave the two her blessing. Now onto the chapter.

>

Chapter 13: Pictures

"And here we are," Taylor said as she stepped through the opening into the moon pool.

"I really got to remember the way here," James muttered, following her in, "Then again then I wouldn't need such a cute escort."

Taylor flashed a smile at him before replying, "Thank you, but hurry up. I really don't want any of the others finding us here."

"Why? Now that I'm part of the secret circle of mermaids, I don't see the problem," James asked as he opened his bag, which hung around his shoulder.

"It's not about the being here. It's about you taking pictures of the moon pool," she retorted as he prepared his camera, "Frankly I'm not a big fan of it either, butâ€|" Her voice trailed off as her face blushed a slight shade of red.

"You couldn't resist my charm," James smiled as he raised the camera to his eye, "Don't worry. These pictures will go under the file 'to never be seen by anyone expect James'. Happy?"

"Just hurry up," Taylor told him, but couldn't help but smile as she stepped out of his camera view and leaned against a wall.

She watched James take pictures of the pool, the volcano wall and many other things. Slowly her mind drifted off, only to be brought back by a flash of a camera pointed directly at her. "I thought you wanted to take pictures of the moon pool," Taylor said.

"But I like this motive much better," James smirked.

Taylor rolled her eyes, but couldn't help but smile. "I'm sure you can find a better motive," she replied, "Now hurry up. I really don't like the thought of having Emily or any of the others for that matter find us here."

"I'll make you a proposition," James suggested, "I take two more pictures and then we leave."

"But?" Taylor asked.

"I want them of you as a mermaid," he told her.

"Are you crazy?" Taylor demanded, "No way."

"Come on. I promise they'll go into the same file as the rest," James retorted, making puppy eyes at her.

Taylor tried to look away. It was unfair. He knew her weakness for his puppy eyes. But it was too late. "Okay, but only two," Taylor gave in and dove into the moon pool. Just as she surfaced in the water she heard the first click of the camera and the shutter closing. The second flash came when she rested her arms on the edge of the moon pool with her tail poised behind her.

James smiled as he looked at the end product on his camera. "Perfect," he told her as he put the camera in his bag, "As I promised I'm done."

"Help me out," Taylor said, reaching her hand out.

James took her hand, but only to be pulled into the moon pool by his girlfriend. "I'm going to get you for this," he said as he surfaced and splashed water at her. Laughing they splashed water at one another for a moment.

Sputtering James finally pushed himself out of the water. "That was cheap," he told her.

"But it worked. Besides which guys dream isn't it to have a water fight with a mermaid?" Taylor smiled, mischievously, "Now help me up for real." Even though he didn't trust the peace, he helped her and this time actually didn't need to get wet in the process. After Taylor had returned to normal, they left the moon pool and returned to the mainland by boat. They docked by the docks where they had rented the boat. Rachel's had unfortunately been in the shop for repairs after she had found a hole in the side of the boat, forcing the duo to rent one. Otherwise they would have 'borrowed' hers quietly and hopefully have brought it back before she would have noticed its absence.

While Taylor waited for James to return for the boat rental she sat on a bench, placing his camera next to her and watching the hustle and bustle of the docks. A lot of people came from the pier or came for the market that was on the dock, many merchants praising their catch or other goods. Taylor let her gaze slide over the crowd of people and her heart stopped as her look fell on a certain person. There, only a few yards away from her, stood Dr. Alder. Though he wasn't looking at her at the moment, she couldn't be sure if he hadn't already seen her. Taylor felt panic raise inside her, feeling insecure because she's all alone without any of the other mermaids, even though there were tons of people. There was only one thing on her mind. Get out of here! Find anyone! Shoving people out of her way, she sprinted down the pier. In her mind she thought she heard someone call her name, but she kept running.

Suddenly someone grabbed her arm, making her come to a lurching halt, and give a startled scream. Out of breath Taylor turned, expecting to see Dr. Alder, but instead she saw into the eyes of James. "What's wrong?" he asked, looking at his terrified girlfriend.

"I saw Dr. Alder. I panicked," Taylor stammered, shaking all over, "I'm sorry."

"It's okay," James replied and pulled her into a hug. He had heard the story of the mad scientist and could understand her fear for him. Any slip up or accidental sighting of any of the girls could send the man after them again.

When her heartbeat finally calmed down, Taylor realized that their scene had attracted a lot of onlookers. "We should go," Taylor muttered, bright red and tried to pull James after her.

"Wait," he said, "Where is my camera?" Taylor froze as she realized that she had left the camera on the bench during her sudden flight. The duo made their way back to the bench, Taylor keeping an eye on the crowd as she walked half hidden behind James. Luckily they found the camera where they had left it without any distractions and went home.

"So where have you and James been?" Emily smiled as the two returned. She was sitting at Emily's kitchen table, playing cards with the rest of the mermaids.

"Oh you know. Helping James find some good motives for his pictures," Taylor replied.

"I'm sure none of those included you," Amber joked, making Taylor turn bright red.

"Stop it, Amber. You're embarrassing Taylor," Sarah retorted, giving her friend a meaningful look. Amber pouted, but said nothing else.

"I'm going to look at the pictures," James excused himself and walked upstairs.

"And now you won't see anything of him for the next few hours or days, depending, as he sorts through the pictures. That's the only drawback to the whole thing," Emily said, "But I'm glad to see that you two are happy."

"Thanks," Taylor replied.

"Love is a great thing, isn't it," Rachel mused as she leaned back in her chair, "Especially when it's new."

"Stop it," Taylor retorted, her face turning even brighter red.

"Oh come on. You know we're just teasing," Amber began, but was interrupted by a loud crashing noise coming from upstairs.

"Your parents aren't home, right?" Rachel questioned, carefully and Emily nodded. Curious the five mermaids walked up the stairs.

"James, is everything alright?" Emily asked as she stepped in front of his door and knocked. When no reply came and the only thing they heard was various noises the girls opened the door. The sight of James' usual tidy room being completely turned upside down greeted them. Clothes were scattered all over the floor, drawers were pulled half out of the dresser and papers were everywhere. In the middle of all this was James, on all fours, rummaging through a pile of papers. "James, what is going on?" Emily asked, scared, having never before seen her brother like this.

"It's gone," James replied, not looking up.

"What's gone?" Sarah inquired.

"The sd card with the pictures on it," James answered, still not meeting their gaze.

"You mean with the pictures we took today?" Taylor questioned, fear rising inside her. The panicking voice of his girlfriend finally made him look up. James nodded. Taylor's legs buckled as she whispered, "This is bad."

The four looked at the couple now both on their knees. "What's so bad about that? Okay, I guess you lost some pictures, but you can take them again," Amber pointed out.

"It's not that," Taylor began softly.

"Then what is it?" Sarah asked.

"We were at the moon pool this morning. James took pictures of it, some with me in them. Also some more with me as aâ€¦ you know," Taylor confessed. Even though the girls knew exactly what Taylor meant, she couldn't dare speak it out.

"What!" Emily exclaimed, "Why did you do that?"

"It's not Taylor's fault. I convinced her to take me," James spoke up.

"It doesn't matter now. We have to find that card before someone sees its contents," Sarah interrupted them. It amazed James that the usually soft spoken girl seemed to be able to break up any kind of fight in the making. "Do you have any idea where you might have lost it?" Sarah inquired.

"No. I always close my camera bag securely. Seeing I didn't want anyone to see the pictures I immediately took the memory card out of the camera once we were done at Mako and put it in a separate pocket so I wouldn't lose it. The only time someone could have had the time to steal the card was while we were at the docks," James told them.

"Why do you think someone stole it? Unless the person knew what was on the card, which is pretty impossible, nobody would have a reason to take it. At least not without the camera," Emily objected, "Maybe you did accidentally leave the zipper open." The siblings glared at each other challengingly.

"So that means our search area is from Mako all the way to the docks," Sarah summarized.

"It's impossible for us to search all of that, even if we are six people," Amber objected.

"Wait, what about that scientist that you saw?" James reminded Taylor.

"Scientist?" Rachel repeated, gravely, "You mean Dr. Alder?"

"Yeah, I saw him and ran," Taylor told them.

"It must have been him. There is no other person, who would be after us or is even close to knowing our secret," Rachel said.

"Let's not get ahead of ourselves," Emily replied, "Maybe it just fell out of your bag at some point."

"You know I would never be that careless with my things," James retorted.

"It could have happened on accident," Emily objected as they started up again.

"Why don't we just check all the places you were and see if we can't find it?" Sarah suggested, stopping the siblings at that.

"Okay," Amber agreed, "How about Emily, Sarah and me will check Mako, while you three see if it's somewhere on the docks?" The six nodded and split up.

As Taylor, Rachel and James arrived at the docks, the couple directed the group to the bench. While Taylor and James searched around the bench, Rachel looked about. On the other side of the docks, a ship caught her eye. It was the same type as Dr. Alder had had before the fire. Rage flared back up inside her and Rachel walked towards it. She was sure that if anyone had the photos, it was the scientist. Any form of fear that she had towards the scientist was extinguished by the rage of his open theft. Not to mention by the idea of what he could do with them.

Without thinking she walked up the gangplank and onto the ship. Rachel quickly found her way to the lab, where she spotted Dr. Alder with his back to her. "Do you have them?" Rachel asked, making Dr. Alder turn around surprised.

"Ah, Rachel, what a pleasant surprise," the scientist said, but realized that something was bothering the girl, "What brings you here?"

"Do you have them?" she repeated, angrily.

"I'm afraid I don't know what you're talking about," Dr. Alder replied.

"Don't you? I know you have the pictures. Who else would take them?" Rachel objected.

"You can continue to accuse me all day, but I still won't know what

you're talking about," Dr. Alder told her in a still calm voice.

Rachel's anger subsided for a moment to realize that the scientist really didn't seem to know what she was talking about. "You really didn't take them?" she questioned, her eyes narrowed on her opponent.

"No," Dr. Alder retorted, firmly.

"It seems the scientific community paid for a new boat," Rachel said, her eyes wandering around the lab, "Got some new equipment, I see."

"It tends to do that for top scientists," Dr. Alder shrugged, taking a seat at a work bench, "Want to join me?"

"I'll decline," Rachel retorted curtly, "I'm sure the community wouldn't pay for your boat, if they knew what you were really like."

"Do you honestly believe anyone shows their true face in such a community?" the scientist questioned, his eyes narrowing.

"Whatever. I'm leaving. Good day, Dr. Alder," Rachel said and turned to leave.

"I wish to warn you, Rachel. Whatever you are up against, it's far more dangerous than you can imagine," the scientist told her.

Rachel whirled around on the spot. What did he know about the tentacles? "What do you know?" Rachel inquired, her eyes narrowed.

"Whatever attack you and me on the boat back then, and I'm assuming it wasn't your friends, because they wouldn't hurt you, will not back down due to anything," Dr. Alder explained, "Take care of yourself." Rachel took that as her sign to leave and did so.

Outside she found Taylor and James waiting for her. "What are you doing in there?" Taylor asked, "It's dangerous to go in there alone."

"Don't worry. He knows not to toy with me," Rachel answered, "Besides we had to know, if he has them or not."

"And?" James inquired. Rachel shook her head, replying, "How about you?"

"No luck," Taylor said, but her gaze was thoughtful.

"Let's head back to the house. Maybe the others had more luck," James suggested and Rachel nodded.

The two began to walk off, but quickly realized that Taylor wasn't following them. "What's wrong?" James asked.

"Go on without me. I'll be right behind you. I just want to walk on the beach for a moment alone," Taylor told them.

"You sure?" Rachel questioned and Taylor nodded. Although the two didn't want to, they headed down the street, while Taylor walked towards the beach.

As Taylor strolled down the beach, her thoughts were racing. If it really wasn't Dr. Alder and James really hadn't lost it, then there was only one explanation left. No, that couldn't be true. What was she going to do? Things were getting to complicated for her own good. With a sigh she sunk to the ground into the cool sand. There was no way this was happening.

Taylor was pulled from her thoughts when she once again had the feeling of being watched. Why? "I know you're out there! Come out!" Taylor yelled at the ocean. She waited, expecting something to rise from the ocean, but nothing happened.

"I'm here," a voice suddenly said from behind her, causing shivers to run down her spine, "No need to shout." Taylor whirled around to see a figure standing there, but the sun behind the person made it impossible to be able to see their features. Taylor stared at the figure for a moment. "So what do you want? You called me," the figure asked, breaking Taylor out of her trance.

"You have it, don't you?" Taylor replied, "The pictures?"

* * *

><p>"So you haven't found it either," Rachel said after Sarah, Emily and Amber had returned.<p>

"Nope. Nothing but sand," Amber replied, "We practically dug up the whole moon pool."

"If it's not on Mako nor at the docks or with Dr. Alder where is it?" Emily wondered.

"I'm more worried about Taylor," Sarah replied.

"It can't be easy for her. The pictures show her as a mermaid. If anyone finds them, she's done for," Rachel pointed out.

James slammed his fist on the table. "I should never have persuaded her to let me take her picture, to let me see Mako," he said, angry with himself, "This is all my fault."

"Don't say that. It could have been any of us for that matter," Emily tried to comfort him, placing a hand on his shoulder.

Before any of the others could say anything the door opened and Taylor walked in. "Taylor," the girls began, but stopped seeing how solemn the girls face was.

"Is everything alright?" James asked, coming up to her. She simply nodded and held her closed fist out towards them. Slowly she opened it to reveal a sd-card.

"Is thatâ€|?" Sarah asked, astonished and Taylor nodded once more.

"Where did you find it?" James inquired.

"Please tell me you didn't just find that in your belongings," Amber joked.

"Why are you so upset, if you found it?" Rachel asked, worried at how strange her friend was acting.

Taylor looked at all her friends before taking a deep breath and whispering softly, "I have a confession to make."

"What now? You're also dating my long lost brother?" Amber joked, but stopped when she noticed how serious Taylor was.

"I know who is attacking us," Taylor confessed.

"What!" all five of them exclaimed, staring at Taylor in disbelief, "Who?"

****A/N: ****Yes, who? Who is the mysterious assailant, who keeps attacking the mermaids? What more could be revealed? Please review.

14. Past

****A/N: ****Sorry for the cliffhanger, but there was just no way around it. I hope this chapter gives you some answers to this mystery. Thanks to everyone for reading and reviewing. Here is chapter 14. Enjoy!
>

****Dknight27** Bella has had few appearance in this story so far, thus little is known about her. It is never stated, if she did or didn't have powers. Can't say much more.**

****h2omermaidforever** I don't always end with cliffies, just sometimes. As for who it is and when I'll update, it's now. ;) **

****Anonamous** Thanks for telling me. I hope I did a better job with the spelling here.**

****CelticH20** Jaylor sounds nice.**

Italics mean a flashback.

Previously... Taylor takes James to the moon pool, where he takes pictures, also of her. However they lose them and have to admit it to the others. Searching without luck, Taylor meets a mysterious person and returns home to confess that she knows who their attacker is. Now on to the chapter._

Chapter 14: Past

"I know who is attacking us," Taylor confessed.

"What!" all five of them exclaimed, "Who?"

Taylor could feel five sets of eyes bore into her. She took a shaking breath and answered, "It's Marissa."

As the five just stood there for a moment, Taylor could see their brains working, trying to put a face to a name. Then Sarah, who gave up first, asked, "Who's Marissa?"

Only now it dawned on Taylor that they obviously couldn't know who she was talking about. "Marissa is a friend from Ireland," Taylor explained.

"A friend?" Emily repeated, confused, "Why would a friend attack you?"

"Wait. If she has been attacking us then she has powers right?" Rachel questioned, her tone unreadable.

"Yes," Taylor whispered, "She is a mermaid from Ireland like me."

"What!" Amber exclaimed, furious, "So you knew about another mermaid and never even considered that she might be behind all this?!" Taylor flinched at Amber's volume.

"But didn't you tell us that there were no other mermaids?" Sarah inquired, "Why did you lie?" Taylor started to shake with panic. This was exactly what she had been afraid of. They hated her. Any hope of maintaining a friendship with them was slowly, but surely being torn to shreds.

"Stop it," James suddenly commanded, breaking the strange tension, "Let Taylor explain herself. She must have a good explanation for all this." Surprised Taylor looked to James, who had said nothing until then. With a meek nod she thanked him and turned to the mermaids. They too seemed more content to listen to her now as though his strict words blew away from rage.

"Marissa and I have been friends since we were four. The moon pool called to us when we were 7 and transformed us into mermaids," Taylor told them.

Rachel thought for a moment and then asked, "Was she also part of that place?"

"That place?" Emily repeated, confused as they stared at Rachel. For the second time in a short while they found Rachel knowing more than she had admitted to.

Taylor saw no more reason to hide anything from them and since she was already telling the truth she decided to tell everyone. "Bella is not my real mother. She's my aunt. After she found out that her niece was in a foster home, she and her husband adopted me when I was ten," Taylor explained and watched the expression of her friends' faces. Rachel stayed neutral, as expected, but the rest showed the pitying gaze that Taylor hated so much. "I don't need your sympathy," Taylor quickly added.

"What happened to your real parents?" Sarah inquired, but realized it might have been insensitive and added quickly, "If you want to tell us."

"My mother left shortly after my birth and so my father took care of me. Although he was a great, kind man, he was an alcoholic. He was

always on and off jobs, never having one for long and sometimes would have fits of rage, but he would never hurt me, or at least I don't remember that he did," Taylor answered, "However child services took me away one day and put me in a foster home when I was four. My father never came to look for me and the foster home searched for any living relatives that I might still have. However as the months past I started to drown in sorrow and confusion. It was then that I met Marissa. She helped me get used to life in a foster home and we became friends..." As she said those words, they triggered a memory.

A five year old Taylor laid curled up on bed, which stood in a row with many others to one side of the room. She was in her dormitory, the curtains drawn shut to leave out any sunny. She was crying. "Why are you crying?" a voice suddenly asked, making her look up startled. She hadn't heard anyone come in. Standing in front of her bed was a girl, who she recognized as one of her dormmates. "Who are you?" Taylor questioned. "My name is Marissa," the girl smiled, but then became serious again, "Why are you crying? It's your birthday today, right?" Taylor wiped her tears out of her eyes and answered, "This is no birthday. Where is my dad? Won't he come? Just singing happy birthday at breakfast isn't a birthday." Taylor could feel tears starting to well up again when Marissa reached her hand out to her and said, "Come with me Taylor. Lets get out of here and do something." Taylor stared at the hand for a moment, as though it could be contagious, but then took it and let herself be led out the room.

Taylor smiled at the memory. Back then they had played in a sandbox the whole day, but it had been the best day she had spent at the foster home so far. Since then the two had been inseparable. "I can say with great certainty that if it wasn't for Marissa back then, who helped me out of my depression, I would not have survived," Taylor concluded her recollection.

The five stared at Taylor, even Rachel, since she had never heard this extent of the story, the forbidden sympathy welling up inside them. "Was it that bad?" Amber asked in an usually kind voice, remembering the horror tales that some people told of foster care.

Taylor quickly shook her head and replied, "No, I was lucky. I always had nice foster families or at least nicer ones. That doesn't mean that there aren't other kinds of foster families, who treat us foster children not as kindly. But for me it was the fact of ever changing homes, never calling a house home for long. The problem is that families usually have set time or age for how long they'll keep a child and the really good ones are always taken. Never settling somewhere long, never building permanent relationships is tough. Marissa was the only who was always there for me no matter what and so I decided to stay in the foster home at the age of seven, like her. Shortly after I made that decision, we turned into mermaids."

"You were able to keep it a secret in a foster home?" Sarah questioned, marveling at the feat.

"It wasn't easy. We obviously had no idea what being a mermaid entailed. We snuck out of bed after lights out to shower and always had to be careful around water. During our first full moon we were

both moonstruck and turned all the drinks at dinner into gelatin," Taylor replied, smiling as she remembered the good memories, "Our supervisors demanded to know who had done it and when no one came forward to confess, everyone was forced to clean the house the next day. It was Marissa who said that we had to get our powers under control and face the moon. That's what we did and it worked. Since then we haven't once been moonstruck."

"That's amazing," Emily muttered, admiringly, "You were very brave."

"We were able to keep this up for three years without anyone ever finding out. Often we stole away from the house to go swimming or to just float in the moon pool. However when I was 10 Bella and her husband arrived. She said she was my aunt, but didn't have anything to do with my dad for many years. Bella had only just heard of me being in the foster system, because she was traveling around the world at the time, and took me in. That's why it took the foster home so long to find her. I was amazed at how kind she was. She took me in like I was her own child," Taylor continued, "She even agreed to move to Rockport, so that I wouldn't have to get used to a new environment."

"And what happened to Marissa?" Rachel inquired.

"She stayed in the foster home. We met in the afternoons and during school, if she attended," Taylor answered, "It wasn't the same, but it was better than nothing."

"She didn't attend school?" Emily questioned, in disbelief.

"Marissa was never one for school. She skipped it sometimes, but after I moved in with Bella it seemed to become more," Taylor explained, "That's how our life was. Until of course, I came here with you."

"But why didn't you tell us about her? Why is she attacking us?" Amber demanded to know.

"During the time that passed between meeting you for the first time and the meeting in the moon pool, I obviously found Marissa and told her about you. She asked me to keep her out of all my stories, which I did. I don't know why she didn't want to meet you, but she listened in on our conversation and later persuaded me to go with you to the Gold Coast," Taylor replied and then added meekly, "She assured me by saying that she would follow me. I don't know why she's attacking us. I really don't." The mermaids stared at each other, each silently following their own thoughts.

"And what does the sd card have to do with all this?" James questioned, breaking the silence.

"She was the one who took it," Taylor explained and regaled them in her tale as she thought back.

_"I know you're out there! Come out!" Taylor yelled at the ocean. She waited, expecting something to rise from the ocean, but nothing happened. _

_"I'm here," a voice suddenly said from behind her, causing shivers to run down her spine as she recognized the voice, "No need to shout." Taylor whirled around to see a figure standing there, but the sun behind the person made it impossible to be able to see their features. Taylor stared at the figure for a moment. It had been so long since she had seen her. "So what do you want? You called me," Marissa asked, breaking Taylor out of her trance. _

_"You have it, don't you? The pictures," Taylor replied. With a smile Marissa produced the card from her pocket. _

_"It was amazingly easy to get a hold of it," she said as she tossed it to Taylor, who caught it. _

_"Why do this?" Taylor asked, "You nearly gave a heart attack." _

_"I was bored," Marissa smirked, but then turned serious, "You really think that boy is good for you?" _

_"James is a good person. He'll keep my secret, I'm sure of it," Taylor retorted. _

_"If you say so," Marissa replied, dismissively. _

_"What's that supposed to mean?" Taylor inquired. _

_"He's a human, Taylor. How long until he sells you out for a story or asking favors in exchange for keeping the secret?" Marissa asked. _

_"He's not like that. Not every human is out for profit," Taylor objected. _

"Keep telling yourself that. Lets hope you wake up before it's too late, because I won't be around to save you this time," Marissa said.

_"I still have the others. Emily, Sarah, Amber and Rachel," Taylor retorted, "They will help me." _

_"From what I've seen, they can barely defend themselves, let alone you," Marissa told her, "What about that scientist? If it wasn't for me, you would already be the star of the scientific community." _

_"Slowly it dawned on Taylor what her friend was saying and she stammered, "It was youâ€¦ You started the fire on Dr. Alders ship." _

_"Marissa nodded, smiling, "You can thank me later." _

_"Thank you?! You could have seriously hurt Rachel or Dr. Alder!" Taylor exclaimed. _

_"Small sacrifices have to be made to achieve a larger goal," Marissa simply replied as she turned to walk away, "It seems like your head has already been polluted. I'm surprised you haven't told them about me yet. I'll see you soon, Taylor. I'm sure our intertwined paths will make us meet again." _

_"Wait! Why are you attacking us?" Taylor questioned, "What did they ever do to you?" Marissa ignored Taylor and with grace, that can only be learned through years of practice, she dove into the water. Taylor stared after her friend. This whole scene was a shot in the heart. Her life long friend didn't seem to exist anymore. At least not like she had once been. What more she was now fill with more doubt than ever.

>

"That girl is crazy," Amber said as Taylor finished her recollection.

"Please don't call Marissa crazy. I know she can be a little hard to deal with, but she hasn't had an easy life," Taylor replied.

"She's trying to kill us," Amber retorted, "No screwed up life can account for that."

"Amber, calm down," Sarah said, "Getting angry won't help."

"That at least explains the fire on Dr. Alders boat," Rachel muttered, though she didn't seem too angry.

"Wait a minute. If Marissa became a mermaid in your moon pool, how is she able to control water to make it into a tentacle or create fire?" Emily questioned, thoughtfully.

Taylor looked to the side uncomfortably and then answered, "I think I knowâ€¦ Marissa must have used the full moon on the day that I arrived to gain your powers."

"That's possible?" James questioned, but the mermaids could only shrug.

"There is no other explanation," Taylor replied.

"Wait, then she has all three of our powers and yours," Amber concluded, "No wonder we were never able to beat her really with that much magic."

"Are you sure you don't know what she's up to?" Sarah asked.

Taylor nodded. "I don't know. She never mentioned it to me," Taylor answered and then rubbed her temples, "If you don't have any more questions, can I go to bed? I'm really tired."

"One more question," Amber spoke up, even though she could see that Taylor was already fighting the weariness, "Why know? Why are you telling us all this now? You must have suspected it was Marissa for some time now and she even endangered the lives of so many people."

"You're right. I have suspected that it was Marissa since the second or third attack," Taylor admitted, weakly, "However I didn't want to believe it. I tried to convince myself that it couldn't be her. However when she admitted to it today, I couldn't lie to myself and you anymore. Can I go now?"

None of them said anything more and Taylor simply went upstairs. Even

James couldn't bring himself to talk to his girlfriend.

Upstairs Taylor curled up onto her bed. The day had been too much for her. On the one hand she had finally told Sarah, Amber, Emily and Rachel the truth. About her, about Marissa, about everything. She had finally come clean, but at the same time Taylor knew she had lost something of theirs. Their trust. Their trust in her. On the other hand she had finally seen Marissa after such a long time. Never before, ever since Taylor could remember, were they apart for more than a day. She would have thought it would have been a joyous reunion with a hug. She would have thought that she would find out that it had all been a big misunderstanding and that everyone could be friends. Instead Taylor met a stranger. No matter how she looked at it that was not the Marissa she knew from those many years back. And even though that person she met wasn't Marissa, Taylor felt like she was betraying Marissa. No matter what she did she could never make it right for everyone. Her head hurt as her thoughts raced, but she could not shut them off. Even though she had more friends than ever, even a boyfriend, right now, at this very moment, she felt the most alone, like back then when she first arrived at the foster home. She could only hope that once more someone would reach out to save her.

The next day the five girls walked to school, though it was different than usual. No one talked, no joyful faces were present. The four Australian mermaids looked at Taylor worried. She hadn't slept at all that night and was subdued, her thoughts not leaving her alone for even a second. However the four others and James were no better off. All night they had worried about their friend, but couldn't bring themselves to talk to her. Whether this was, because they felt betrayed by Taylor or simply because they didn't know what to say to her, they couldn't tell. The five of them had sat in the kitchen for a long time in silence and had each for themselves digested the information that Taylor had given them. Late at night they all went home and into their bedrooms, but even there they could find no rest. Thus all the girls were exhausted and it would prove to be a long and difficult school day.

Just then someone stepped into their path, forcing the group to an abrupt halt. "Watch where you're going," Amber reproached the person.

Taylor slowly looked up and her eyes widened. "Marissa," she whispered, making all the girls stare at the girl in their path. Her hair was a strange blonde that seemed to give off a light, greenish hue and went all the way to the small of her back, curling beautifully in the process. Her eyes were the color of the crystal blue ocean. The word beautiful would not do her justice and no matter how the girls looked at her, the aura of a mermaid that Marissa gave off was intriguing. How could someone like this could ever be after them, seemed to be the only question on everyone's mind.

Once the girls had snapped out of their daze, they each carefully got their hand ready to call upon their magic, preparing for an assault. Would she attack them on the open street in front of so many people? If she did they would have no choice, but to defend themselves, even if it meant revealing their secret. Marissa simply smirked and asked, "Aren't you going to introduce us, Taylor?" Although she found the request odd, Taylor was about to begin introducing everyone, when Marissa interrupted, "On second thought don't. I know all I need to

know about you."

Amber gritted her teeth and clenched her fist as she hissed, "You know nothing about us."

"Don't I, fire girl?" Marissa smirked, arching an eyebrow, "I don't think you want to know what I know about you." Amber glared at the girl, but she remained unimpressed.

"And you can all stop getting ready to pounce. I have no intention of attacking you here," Marissa told them, but none of them relaxed even a muscle, "Suit yourself. I only wanted you to be more comfortable while I talk to you, so you can stop thinking of me as rude."

"What do you mean?" Emily questioned.

"Taylor is the one who wanted to know," Marissa replied and added after a dramatic pause, "â€|Why I attack you."

Immediately all five's attention was on Marissa even more than it had already been. "You're just going to tell us?" Rachel inquired in disbelief.

"Yes," Marissa answered with a nod, "In truth I'm not after you. You're just in my way."

"Then what are you after?" Sarah demanded to know.

"Just stay out of my way and we won't have a reason to meet anymore," Marissa retorted and with that turned on her heel and walked off, "This is your last warning."

The five stared after Marissa, but none could seem to be able to pull themselves from the spot where they were rooted. It took Emily looking at her watch and exclaiming, "Guys, school starts in a few minutes! We have to hurry!" for them to get going. Once more they were all going after their own thoughts.

****A/N: ****Their enemy has been revealed, but at the same time more questions have been thrown into the air. What is Marissa really after? Will the girls be able to rekindle after the blow that Taylor's confession brought upon them? Please review.

15. Friends?

****A/N: Another update! Man, when you don't have school bugging you all the time, it's amazing what you can get done, especially considering this chapter is fairly long. Thanks for reading it. Here is chapter 15. Enjoy!****

****h2omermaidforever** That's exactly what I thought when I finished the last chapter and now I'm changing it. Got to give the boys their screen time, right? ;)**

****Ananomous** It's great to know that I've made progress. I hope to continue it.**

Previously... Taylor confesses to the girls that her friend from Ireland, Marissa, is after the attacks. She reveals more about her

past and the girls start to doubt her loyalty to them. A surprise encounter with Marissa leaves the group threatening to fall apart. Now on to the chapter.

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Chapter 15: Friends?

"This is horrible," Rachel thought as she sat on a bench on the school campus, her head resting on her palms. The bell had just rung, ending the school day. However instead of the five of them leaving together to go home and laughing, each of them was walking alone, solemnly. The whole day they had been subdued, not a single word was exchanged between them. Even as the last bell rang, they hadn't left the classroom together. Amber had stormed out before the sound of the bell even subsided, but Rachel suspected that the blonde had also been fleeing from the lesson. Emily had followed in an orderly fashion, not too hasty, but not too slow either, so that it wouldn't gather attention. Taylor had been out of it the whole day and had stumbled through the door after most of the other students had left. Sarah had turned around to look at Rachel, her eyes revealing a lot of her inner conflict, and then her gaze went back to Taylor to watch her leave, before she had done the same. Rachel had slowly packed her things and left as the last one. Now, instead of going to the science club, where she had been expected, she had sat down on campus to think.

Maybe they would have made up by now, but after Marissa had caught up with them that morning that fantasy had been blown out of the window. Any understanding of Taylor's situation had been destroyed by Marissa and her behavior. None of them could understand how Taylor could cover for such a person. Although Rachel couldn't understand it, she did not resent Taylor for it. She was closer to Taylor than any of the other three, probably because it was hard to become part of such a tightly knitted group. Rachel knew that, seeing it had taken her a lot of time to get in it, even if the others hadn't tried to keep her out on purpose. It's just that there was always something special about the core of such a group.

Plus Taylor had confided in her a lot more than in the others. About her past, her family and her love for James. Although it left a sour taste in her mouth to think that Taylor did not trust her enough to tell her about Marissa, Rachel couldn't force herself to believe that Taylor had done it all on purpose.

Subconsciously Rachel had reached for her phone and dialed a number as her head revolved around her thoughts. Only when a voice came out of the phone did she realize what she was doing. "Rachel? What's wrong?" Alex asked as he took the call, "You have mermaid problems again?"

"Okay, who told you? You can't seriously have guessed it," Rachel demanded to know.

"No one told me nor did I guess," Alex retorted.

"Then what makes you think something is wrong?" Rachel questioned.

"I can tell because of your voice," Alex explained, which made Rachel blush, slightly, "Plus you're calling me in the middle of school."

Need I say more? So what's wrong?" Instantly her blush subsided and she almost thought of a snippy remark, but then told him what had happened with a sigh. He never interrupted her once. A quality she loved him even more for.

At the end of the story Alex was silent for a moment and then said, "I'll be honest that it's not easy and there isn't exactly a textbook answer to this either."

"But?" Rachel questioned, hopefully.

"I'll say this much. The one who's hurting the most is Taylor and you know that. You were in the same situation only last year. They didn't trust you anymore," Alex told her, "Do what you wish they would have done for you?"

Rachel listened astonished. Now that he had said it, it seemed so obvious. How could she not have thought of it? "Thank you, Alex. I'll do that," Rachel smiled.

"Welcome," Alex replied, "But now I should go before the teacher realizes that I'm taking too much time in the bathroom. She probably already thinks I passed out or something." Rachel laughed as she realized what she had done.

Alex was about to hang up when Rachel said, "I love you and not just for your great advice."

"I hope so. I love you too," Alex replied, "Bye. Talk to you soon." With that he hung up.

Rachel looked at her phone, lovingly. The few encouraging words and a laugh was all she had needed and she felt her resolve as strong as before the whole mess. Rachel jumped up from her seat, startling a few students that just happened to walk past her in that moment, and hurried off.

* * *

><p>Sarah didn't even leave the school, but instead walked down to the science rooms. She knew who she would find there. In one of the rooms a few members of the science club were already assembling, even though they still had half a hour time. One of them was Ryan, however she also noted that Rachel was absent. From the door she waited for him to look up. It took the nudging of one of the other members to get him to look up and come to her. "You have a minute?" Sarah asked, "I need someone to talk to." Ryan nodded and followed her into an empty classroom a few doors down.<p>

There, after they had each sat down on a table, she explained what had happened the night before and that morning. Ryan had noticed that the girls had been acting differently, but hadn't been able to say anything, seeing no moment seemed good enough. Silently he listened to his girlfriend's problem. "Fascinating," Ryan muttered when Sarah had finished, "I never would have thought a mermaid could gain even more powers, if she was in a different moon pool than her own."

If Sarah hadn't been sitting firmly, she was sure to have fallen off her desk. Then again what had she been expecting from Ryan? "It seems so," Sarah agreed.

"Then she's as strong as all four of you combined, if we exclude Rachel, who isn't a real mermaid anymore," Ryan hypothesized.

"Yeah," Sarah replied, "We are usually in a stalemate with her and only if all four of us and Rachel work together can we beat her."

"And what is she after?" Ryan questioned.

"No idea. She says she's not after us, even though she's only been attacking us so far," Sarah answered.

They sat there in silence for a moment, thinking about Marissa and her motives. "And what bothers you about all this?" Ryan suddenly inquired when Sarah had almost believed he had forgot why they were even here.

"Well, although I'm not thrilled about Taylor lying to us, I get it. She was protecting a friend and I respect that, even though I would have thought she saw us as good enough friends to tell us the truth," Sarah explained, "Also I wanted to help her, but I knew if I helped her, our group would have split apart even further." Sarah's voice got smaller and smaller as she explained.

"So pretty much you are confused by Taylor's actions and don't understand why she didn't tell you," Ryan summarized, "But you are also are mad at yourself for not sticking up for her and you're wondering what would have happened, if you had." Sarah nodded.

Then Ryan got up, sat down next to Sarah and hugged her. "I think you did the right thing," he told her, his head leaning on hers, "There is no telling what Amber would have done, if you had sided with Taylor. I believe you stopped a lot more damage from occurring by doing nothing." Sarah silently listened to her boyfriend, simply enjoying his closeness. "As for Taylor's actions, let me ask you this," Ryan continued, "If someone were to come to you and say that if you didn't do what he said, he would release the proof of Amber and Emily being mermaids to the world, what would you do? If you weren't allowed to tell them."

Sarah took her head from Ryan's shoulder and looked at him. "I would tell him or her to leave them alone and that I would do whatever he wanted," Sarah answered, "I would never let them get hurt, if I can't stop it. They are my precious friends."

Ryan smiled at her. "There's your answer. To Taylor, not matter how confusing it may be to us, Marissa is a precious friend that has helped her in so many occasions and now Taylor felt it was her turn to protect her friend, even if the method was unorthodox," Ryan smiled.

Sarah looked at Ryan for a moment, then cupped his face and kissed him. "What was that for?" Ryan asked, pleasantly surprised.

"For being the best boyfriend in the world," Sarah smiled and kissed him once more on the cheek, "I have to go now."

"Where to?" Ryan questioned.

"To find Amber and Emily. I need to talk to them," Sarah answered and hurried out the door, "You should also get back to your club." Startled Ryan looked up at the clock. Now, instead of being half a hour too early, he was half a hour too late. Quickly he hurried back to his club to get a disapproving look from the teacher and smothered laughs from his fellow members.

* * *

><p>She hated liars. There were few things, Emily didn't like, but lying was one of them. It was one of the things her mother had passed down to her. Lying was wrong, especially to the people you like. That was one of the reasons she sometimes hated herself. She lied about who she was, but there was no other choice. That's why she tried to lie as little as possible, but Taylor clearly hadn't cared about that. Every time she had talked about herself, about the attacks, she had lied. It made Emily wonder, how much of what she had told them had been a lie. Plus she couldn't understand how Taylor could lie for a person like Marissa. So arrogant.<p>

After Emily left school, she walked to the promenade where she already saw Daniel waiting for her. They had actually planned the date before hand, because they had had such little time to see each other. When Daniel saw Emily his face lit up and he smiled. Emily smiled back, though it was a halfhearted smile. After a brief kiss, they began to stroll down the down the shopping promenade, hand in hand. They did some window shopping and talked. Well, Daniel did the talking, while Emily just followed him, deep in thought. "Yeah, I have some really big exams coming up, so I'm going to have to spend a lot of time studying," he told her, but he had already noticed that Emily wasn't listening, "Actually, I think it's too much pressure for me, so I thought I might drop out. You know, maybe work at a fast food joint."

When this didn't even get a reaction from Emily about how he could throw his future away, he stopped and turned her around, so that she faced him. "What's wrong?" Daniel questioned. "Nothing is wrong," Emily protested, meekly. "Really? Then why have I been talking to myself for the last half hour?" he asked, slightly ticked off. "You haven'tâ€|," Emily began, but saw there was no point to it. Looking around for a quiet place, Daniel understood what it was about. He led her down the steps to the beach to a fairly vacant spot for the location. Sitting down in the sand, Emily began to explain. Daniel only interrupted when he wanted something to be explained more thoroughly.

"So you're mad that she lied to you?" Daniel inquired.

"Yes. She put so many people in danger by doing so and doesn't even seem to care," Emily retorted, "Plus we've been completely upright to her about everything and she just lies to our faces."

"Aren't you being a little bit too harsh?" Daniel retorted, thoughtfully.

"Too harsh? How is it too harsh when Marissa nearly drowned the entire Gold Coast?" Emily objected, firmly.

"You know what, you're right. I think you should stay away from her,"

he finally said, "Not only her, but Taylor especially."

Emily stared at him. "What?" she asked, astonished, almost positive that she had misheard.

"You should stay away from them. Obviously Marissa is a very dangerous person and is not afraid to hurt you to get to whatever she wants," Daniel explained.

"But Taylorâ€¦," Emily began, but Daniel interrupted, "Is a link between you and Marissa. Get rid of you and I'm sure Marissa will leave you alone."

Emily gawked at her boyfriend for a moment and then jumped up, yelling, "How can you say that! Taylor is a friend! I can't just forget about her!"

They stared into each others' eyes for a moment, but then Daniel broke out into a smile. "I'm glad you see it like that," he smiled.

Now Emily was completely lost. "Wait, what?!" she asked.

"I knew you were just angry, but nothing serious that would endanger your friendship to Taylor. You know it's pretty practical to visit a course on psychology," Daniel explained, still smirking, "Now sit down or the others will never stop staring."

Emily looked around to see several people looked over to them and quickly sat down, blushing. "You tricked me," she accused him, but couldn't help but smile.

"Well, now that you have calmed down, how about this. Would you lie to protect Sarah, Amber, or even Rachel?" Daniel asked.

"Of course," Emily answered, immediately.

"Well, it's the same for Taylor. She would do anything for her friend. Imagine what it must have meant for her to betray her friend," he told her.

Emily gazed at Daniel and then hugged him. "Thank you," she breathed into his shirt and then gave him a kiss, "I'm sorry, but I have to go."

Daniel frowned, "I really shouldn't have cheered you up. Now you're leaving again."

As she stood, Emily placed her finger to her lips and looked down to him, teasingly. "I'll make it up to you another time. Promise," she replied and walked off.

"I really shouldn't have let her cheered her up," Daniel muttered, looking after her, but he knew that he could never have not done it. He loved her smile too much for that.

* * *

><p>Amber tapped her foot, annoyed. Jordan was late. After leaving school, she had dropped him a quick text, telling him to meet her at

the camp site. In the summer it housed tons of campers and staff, which had included her only last year, but during the rest of the year it was usually deserted, as it was right now. That's why often the two met there to be alone.<p>

Amber was just pissed off. It wasn't just that Jordan was over half a hour late, but also that Taylor had just flat out lied to them. She wasn't as big of a liar hater as Emily was, but Taylor had, by keeping her mouth shut, contributed to the fact that people were hurt. Amber had unintentionally hurt someone last year under the spell of the new moon and had vowed back then to never let a normal person get hurt because of mermaid things. Because of Taylor, she had broken that promise. A promise she had hoped never to break. Not to mention that people like Marissa easily got under Amber's skin, adding to her anger.

Amber looked up as she heard footsteps approaching. It was Jordan. "You're late," she snapped. She knew it wasn't really Jordan's fault she was in such a bad mood, but she needed to get her anger out and he was the only person here.

"Good day to you too," he retorted, immediately noticing Amber's foul mood, "I had to help a girl find their way." By mentioning it was a girl any chance of Amber coming back to her senses was gone.

"A girl? So couldn't have explained the way, like any normal person, but instead had to escort her there?" Amber demanded to know.

"She was new here," Jordan protested, starting to get angry as well, "You know I'm not your lackey. I don't have to justify myself in front of you."

Just then Jordan's phone rang. A text and judging from the smile it was from that girl. "Why don't you just say so, if you don't want to be together with me anymore!" Amber yelled, "Better be honest, instead of being a lying snake like Taylor!"

"Listen, I don't know what happened between you, but make up. You're unbearable in such a mood," Jordan retorted.

"Like I said, go. I won't hold you back," Amber repeated, annoyed.

"You know what, I will," Jordan said and turned to leave, "Consider us broken up."

With that he walked off. Amber stared after him. Those last words were the slap to the face she needed to get back to her senses. What had she done? Sometimes she hated herself for her temper. Now she had to do something. Something she hated.

* * *

><p>Taylor walked away from school as though in a trance. Everything had been going so well, but now it was coming down all around her. It almost didn't surprise her. "My luck was bound to run out eventually," she thought. The worst part was that she understood it. She understood why everyone was furious with her. She had lied to them, had put not only them, but their family and everyone they knew in danger, and worst of all dared to call herself a friend through it

all. For misusing their trust, she now had to pay the price and it was a high one.<p>

Why hadn't she told them of Marissa from the start? Because Marissa had asked them not to. Why hadn't she told them when she was realizing what her so called friend was doing? Because she had believed in the good that was no longer there. Had it ever been? Taylor shook her head. She had no idea. These and many more questions interrogated her silently. It surprised her that she hadn't already broken down. Hadn't burst into tears. Either way it didn't matter. Breaking down or not, she was alone and no one was going to save her from the darkness that accompanied that loneliness.

Taylor looked up when she heard the noise of joyful chatter. She was passing a beach caf   and just above her a group of girls were sitting at a table on a porch, gossiping and laughing. It wrenched her heart. That could have been her at one point. It struck her that she had no real friends outside of her mermaid group. Obviously with her secret, Taylor had never been keen to make new ones, but now she regretted it. There was no one she could talk to and she envied the girls at the table, who could talk so freely amongst themselves.

A red haired waitress came down the steps towards Taylor. "Can I help you?" she asked, her green eyes looking at her. Taylor simply shook her head, but couldn't help but notice that she seemed stressed. Looking up to the caf   once more, Taylor realized that it was close to bursting with the amount of customers and it seemed she was the only waitress there. "I'm sorry, but I got to go. My coworker called in sick this morning and now I'm managing this all on my own. Sorry, I guess I shouldn't be bothering you with my problems," the waitress said as she hurried back up the steps, "You're welcome to come though. One more person won't matter." Taylor stared after her. She was talking so freely and even though she was stressed out, she didn't say a single mean word and only smiled.

The waitress was nearly back up the stairs, when Taylor asked, "Mind if I jump in?"

Surprised the waitress turned around, her ponytail nearly whip lashing her. "I can't let you  |," she began to object, but started to reconsider as she saw the mass of people waiting for her, "Ever do this before?"

"Occasionally," Taylor answered, though that was a serious understatement, seeing she had been working in a caf   in Rockport for nearly 4 years. The waitress motioned for her to follow.

The next few hours consisted of serving and taking orders. Although it was hard and exhausting work, Taylor was happy. In the chaos she was able to forget her problems and focus completely on the customers, not wanting to disappoint any of them. Through her long years of work, it was like pressing a button and she was back in waitress mode. Although the caf   was fairly small, it attracted many customers, giving them the option to sit on the porch to look out at the ocean or to enjoy the ocean themed interior decor. It was a simple, yet beautiful place.

Once the caf   had cleared out, leaving only a few guests, the waitress waved Taylor over to a table and placed strawberry smoothie in front of her. "Here, as a thank you. It's our famous strawberry

smoothie," she smiled as she sat down across from Taylor, "I don't know what I would have done without you today."

"Die of overworking," Taylor replied and the two had to laugh.

"I'm Sierra, by the way," the waitress introduced herself, "I can only thank you again. You were amazing in there. You sure you aren't a waitress pro?"

"Pretty sure and I'm Taylor," Taylor smiled as she sipped her smoothie, letting the flavor of fresh strawberries and cream expand in her mouth, "I can see why it's famous." It felt good to have someone to talk to that didn't know of the whole mess.

"I'm glad you cheered up. I don't mean to pry, but you seemed very depressed back then," Sierra said, "Was something bothering you?" Instantly she regretted her question as Taylor's face darkened once more as everything came crushing down on the peace that she had just been able to grasp. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to," Sierra began, but Taylor interrupted, "I've got to go." With that she got up, leaving her smoothie half finished, and walked out of the café.

Once outside Taylor felt the weight of her dilemma full force again on her. It was as though the café was a safe haven and now that she left it, she was back in the storm. Just as she reached the bottom of the stairs, Sierra appeared at the top. "If you want, you can help out here again," she told Taylor.

Taylor looked up at her and simply replied, "I'll think about it." Sierra smiled. Taylor started to walk off again.

"Oh and Taylor!" she called after her, "Don't let yourself get dragged down, no matter what the problem is! If you can take care of a mob of customers, you can do anything!" Although Taylor didn't reply nor turn around, a small smile spread across her face. Then just as quickly it disappeared, consumed by her troubles.

Again Taylor walked aimlessly around until she ended up on the beach. Whenever she had a problem, she would go to the moon pool, but seeing that wasn't an option, Taylor just sat down and watched the waves. Retreating and coming back, retreating and back. The waves almost put her in a trance, slowly drowning out her sorrow.

"Taylor," a voice said, shattering Taylor's trance and making her whirl around.

"Rachel," she whispered, seeing her friend as instantly everything came back, "What do you want?"

"I want to do the thing for you that no one did for me back then," Rachel replied.

"What?" Taylor asked, giving her friend a look.

"Well, that sounded cooler in my head," Rachel muttered, but then explained, "Back when I was being controlled, even though I willingly cut off my ties to the others to protect them, I wanted them to come to me. Realize what was wrong with me and help. Of course they did, but until then I was drowning in loneliness, only that stupid voice

in my head was there. I don't want you to be alone."

"But what about Marissa?" Taylor questioned.

"Who cares. I'm not going to let your past or anything stop me," Rachel objected.

Taylor stared at Rachel and felt tears running down her face. "Thank you," she whispered as she wiped the tears away with her back hand.

"Come with me, Taylor," Rachel said as she reached her hand out for her, "You don't have to do this alone." For a moment Taylor thought she saw Marissa standing in front of her. For the second time in her life it seemed like a savior stood before her. "Come on," Rachel coaxed when Taylor hesitated.

Carefully she took the hand and was pulled up. Taylor felt a pleasant warmth spread from her hand throughout her entire body. "Thank you," she whispered as Taylor led her to the street.

"Not for this," Rachel replied, smiling, "I should have done this last night."

"Taylor!" suddenly three voices called. Coming from three different directions, Sarah, Amber and Emily hurried up to the two.

Instinctively Taylor shrank back behind Rachel, who stepped protectively in front of her. "Listen guys, if you are going to disrespect Taylor, leave now. I won't let you hurt her," Rachel told them. All of them stared at each other.

"Taylor, I want to say, I understand. You protected a friend," Sarah spoke up, "I can't find a fault in that."

"And even if you lied to us, how can we blame you for that? Don't we all lie, some maybe more than others," Emily continued.

"I don't really understand anything yet, but I don't think you would put people in danger on purpose," Amber ended.

Taylor stared at the three mermaids. "So... you forgive me?" she asked, stepping out from behind Rachel. All four of them nodded. Looking from Rachel to the others, Taylor realized that she didn't have just one savior from the darkness, but four. Silently she promised herself to not mess this up again.

"Now that this is settled, how about I tell you a bit more about myself," Taylor suggested, smiling, "I know a great place." The four exchanged a confused look, but followed her anyway.

A while later they arrived at the café. Sierra was in the middle of cleaning up. "Hey, Sierra!" Taylor called up, surprising the red head, "Have a table for us?" Sierra smiled and quickly ushered them to a table with a grand view of the beach at the edge of the porch. After quick introductions and the taking of orders, Sierra was about to leave, when Taylor said, "I would love to work here, Sierra. Call me anytime." Sierra beamed from ear to ear and nodded before disappearing to get the drinks.

Taylor was about to start talking, when she noticed how Amber was sulking. "What's wrong?" she asked.

"I kind of yelled at Jordan while I was mad at you. He had met another girl and seemed pretty impressed by her," Amber told them, but then her eyes widened, "Jordan!" All four followed the blonde's gaze to the beach below, where Jordan was walking together with Marissa! "Get away from her!" Amber exclaimed as she was nearly halfway down the stairs.

"Amber," Jordan said startled, "What is your?" He began, but suddenly he found himself face down in the sand.

Looking up, he saw Marissa hold her hand out over him. "I wouldn't move, if I were you," she warned him.

"Get away from him!" Amber commanded as she raised her hand, ready to strike and the others arrived behind her.

"Cool your jets, fire girl. I don't care about your lover at all," Marissa said, nonchalant.

"Then get away from him," Amber repeated, her hand still raised as the others followed suit.

"You really want a battle here?" Marissa questioned, her eyes wandering to the café. Taylor froze and slowly lowered her hand. "You really should follow Taylor's example. She seems to be the smartest one out of you," Marissa told them. Reluctantly they all slowly lowered their hands one after another, Amber lowering hers last. "It seems you're still going to oppose me. I gave you a warning and now I won't have mercy on you," Marissa said.

"What kind of warning? We don't even know what you're after," Emily retorted, "How can we stop protecting something, when we don't even know what it is?"

Marissa was about to say something, when suddenly Sarah's phone rang and she slowly answered it, one eye always on Marissa. "Sarah, it's me, Ryan. Put me on speaker," Ryan said in a frantic voice and Sarah did as she was told, "I figured it out. A lot of the attacks were not aimed at you, but at normal people. She's after normal people."

All five looked up at Marissa. "You really have a smart boyfriend," she sneered, "He's right."

"But why Marissa?" Taylor asked, stepping forward confused.

"Bye, bye," Marissa replied and with that called upon a gust of wind to blow up sand, blocking their view of her. Once the wind ebbed away, she was gone.

"Why?" Taylor repeated, staring at the spot where her friend had just stood.

"Jordan," Amber said as she hurried to his side, "Are you alright?"

"I'll be fine," he answered as he slowly pushed himself up, "I really

have to stop being captured by your enemies. What happened anyâ€|?"

But Amber planted a firm kiss on his lips, cutting off any words. "I'm so glad you're alright," she whispered when they finally broke apart.

"What are you all doing down there?" Sierra asked, confused as she came back outside with the drinks.

After they had caught Jordan up with the latest news, careful not to be overheard by Sierra, and paid for their drinks, the five girls headed home. As the four, Rachel had returned home, entered Emily's house, they were greeted by an unusual sight. Cleo, Emma and Rikki were sitting in Emma's kitchen together with a woman, whose back was to them. "Ah, you're back," Emma greeted them, "Someone wants to meet you."

All of them exchanged a curious look and then the woman turned around. Taylor gasped, "Mom!"

****A/N:**** The girls have patched up the worst of the damage and now know what Marissa is after, but now a new surprise catches them off is Taylor's mother doing there? Will she bring more calm or increase the storm that is already brewing over the Gold Coast? Please review.

16. Tell

****A/N:** I know I usually upload on Sundays, but my brother made me play a new computer game and had me hooked for the whole day. Since I didn't want to wait a whole week, I decided to break my rhythm and post today. Well, everyone, here is chapter 16. Enjoy!**

****CeliticH2O** I agree, I find it a bit confusing myself. Bella is Taylor's aunt and Taylor never met her mother, because she left her right after Taylor was born.**

Previously... The girls disband and seek comfort from their boyfriends. Somehow they are able to forgive Taylor for lying, while Taylor finds comfort in a new friend, who works at a cafe. They come back together in time to find out that Marissa's grudge is against humans. Back home the girls are met by a surprise visitor. Now on to the chapter.
>

Chapter 16: Tell

All of them exchanged a curious look and then the woman turned around. Taylor gasped, "Mom!"

Bella smiled at Taylor. "It's been a while," she said as she stood up, "Aren't you going to give me a hug?"

Taylor jumped forward and hugged Bella, while asking, "What are you doing here?"

"What else can I do when you never call and hardly write anymore?"

Bella answered, causing Taylor to flush red at her open neglect, "I wanted to see how you were doing. Plus a little vacation isn't bad."

"Sorry, it's been pretty hectic," Taylor tried to explain without mentioning certain aspects, "School and such. Where did you leave Will?" She looked around, half expecting him to be hiding around a corner.

"He's in Ireland. He had some business he couldn't leave alone," Bella explained, "He sends his love."

Then Bella's eyes fell on the four girls behind Taylor. Her niece noticed the gaze and quickly introduced, "You might remember Amber, Emily and Sarah and this is Rachel. You apparently already met their mothers. This is my mom, Bella." All four girls inclined their heads and said a greeting.

Bella smiled back, "It's nice to see you again. Nice to meet you Rachel. I would love to hear more about all of you, but the trip was exhausting."

"Where will you be staying?" Taylor questioned.

"In a hotel not far from here," Bella answered.

"That won't do," Rikki interrupted, "You're a guest here. You'll stay with us." Shocked everyone stared at her. It was an unusual proposal coming from Rikki. "What?" she asked, noticing everyone's gaze, "She is a guest and it's not like any of you have any room. You're already housing Taylor, Emma and you, Cleo, have Ethan to worry about. I have more than enough room to have Bella stay."

"If it's really alright with you, then I'll gladly stay with you. Thank you," Bella said, picking up her suitcase, which rested at her feet. She followed Rikki and Cleo, who was also heading home, to the door.

"I'll be back later," Amber called after them.

The five girls then went upstairs, intending on going to Taylor's room, but Taylor hesitated as she passed James' room. She hadn't been able to talk to him yet. Didn't know, if he would forgive her yet? "He's not here right now," Emily told her as though she could read her mind, "He's out with some friends. Probably will be back late tonight. You can talk to him tomorrow." Taylor nodded and followed her friends into her room, where they each found a place to sit.

"Well, that was a surprise," Emily began, "I never would have expected this."

"Tell me about it," Taylor replied, "Though it's true that I've barely contacted her since I got here."

"Not like it's your fault. The whole mermaid thing kept us all pretty busy," Sarah said, "She is nice. We didn't really get a chance to talk to her in Ireland."

"So why haven't you told your mom€ your aunt€ Bella that you're a

mermaid?" Amber asked, stumbling over the correct term of which to use, and effectively cutting off any small talk.

Taylor froze for a moment before answering, "She's my aunt, but I call her mom. It saves me from explaining it to everyone and I guess in a sense she has taken that position. As for why, I guess for one thing I had never heard of it working. Until you showed up Marissa and I believed that we were the only two mermaids out there. We never even considered it a possibility that there could be more."

"You never considered it?" Emily questioned, surprised, "Not even that someone else might have transformed in your pool?"

"No, we made sure to keep any humans as far away from it as possible," Taylor answered.

"And why didn't you ever tell Bella?" Sarah inquired, remembering how hard it had been to lie to her mom for the short time, let alone several years like Taylor.

"Never found the right moment. In the beginning I didn't trust her enough and later when I did call her mom, I didn't want to ruin our relationship. She's not like your mothers. She never heard of mermaids, let alone known they were real. It just seems too much for her," Taylor explained.

"Honestly, Taylor, your mother seems so sweet and open, I don't think there is anything you can throw at her that will make her not love you anymore," Rachel retorted.

"So you're saying, I should tell her?" Taylor questioned, looking at all four of them, who nodded.

"It would make your life a hell of a lot easier and you won't feel horrible for lying to her anymore," Amber pointed out, leaning back into her chair.

"Also once your mom is okay with it, she can help break the news to your dad," Sarah added.

Suddenly Taylor's phone rang. It was a text. "Sierra wants me to work tomorrow morning," Taylor told them, "I guess then I'd better turn in for the night. See you guys tomorrow." Instead of getting up and leaving, all four crossed their arms before their chests and looked at her hard. "What?" Taylor asked, confused, but all she got was more stern gazes. "Okay, okay," she gave in, "I'll tell Bella."

With a satisfied smile the four girls got up and left, chorusing, "Good night."

After she had changed, Taylor laid awake in her bed. She hoped, no almost prayed, that she would hear James come home. The feeling of unknowing between them was impossible to bare. Would he forgive her? Why shouldn't he? "The others had, so why shouldn't he?" said one voice inside her. "Because he is closer to you than any of them. He expects you to tell him the truth," retorted another voice. Those two voices continued debating all throughout the night.

When her alarm clock awoke her the next morning, Taylor realized that she hadn't heard James come home. She had fallen asleep before that.

However she had no time to contemplate it as she needed to hurry. Quickly she dressed and ran out the door. Like the night before Taylor came to a halt in front of James' room. Was he really back? Maybe she should knock? Her hand slowly rose to the door, but an inch before it met the door, she withdrew her hand. She couldn't knock so early in the morning, especially if he came home later last night.

After a quick breakfast, meeting only Emily's dad, Taylor left for the café. Arriving Sierra greeted her, "Hey, sorry to call you out this early, but my coworker is still sick. I got help for the afternoon, but right now I'm all by myself again."

"Not anymore," Taylor smiled and went to work, first setting up the tables and then serving the first customers to arrive.

After working for a few hours, Sierra nudged Taylor in the side. "I think that customer wants you to serve him," she whispered, motioning with her head towards a table. Taylor was about to ask how she knew it when she saw the customer. It was James. "Your boyfriend?" Sierra asked, concluding it from Taylor's expression, "Take your time. You're almost done anyway." Taylor nodded and slowly walked over to James.

"How may I help you?" she asked.

"I got up early to talk to my girlfriend, but she had already left. I was hoping to talk to her," James answered, playfully.

"You're in luck. Seems her coworker likes to play cupid," Taylor smiled.

"So this is your waitress you," James replied, looking up and down Taylor, "I like it."

Taylor sat down beside him, unsure of what to do. Finally she spoke, "I understand, if you don't trust me anymore. I lied to you, which caused your family to be in danger."

James stared at her for a moment. "I still trust you," he said, "Taylor, I love you for your personality. I don't care what you are, whether it's human or mermaid. I'm new to this whole mermaid world and it's confusing at times, so I'll follow you wherever you may take me in this crazy world."

Taylor stared at him for a moment and then pulled James in for a kiss. "What did I do to deserve you?" she asked.

"Be yourself," James answered with a smile, "But alas I must leave my angel alone. I have to go to college." With a final kiss James got up and left, leaving Taylor.

Taylor was about to get back to work when a voice said, "He's a nice boy. Isn't that Emma's son?"

Startled Taylor whirled around to see Bella. "You startled me," she replied, "Yes, that's Emma's son."

"He seems to be a nice boy," Bella smiled.

"What are you doing here?" Taylor asked.

"I wanted to spend some time with my daughter, if that's allowed," Bella answered, but looked around, "That is, if you're free to go."

Taylor looked over to Sierra, who simply waved her hand, indicating for her to go. With a smile Taylor followed Bella away from the café. "So what do you want to do?" Taylor questioned as they walked along the promenade.

"Actually I wanted to talk to you," Bella told her, making Taylor come to an abrupt stop.

Those words brought back what she had talked to the others about. "To be honest, I have to tell you something too," Taylor replied, carefully, causing Bella to look at her interested, "Can I go first?" Bella nodded. "Come with me," Taylor said, but Bella interrupted, "Can I go to the bathroom first?" Taylor nodded and Bella headed off.

Taylor walked towards the ocean, sat down and stared out at it, waiting for Bella to return. "So Bella is here," a voice suddenly said, causing her to look down at close to where the water met land. With her head out of the water, Marissa greeted her friend with a smile.

"Marissa," Taylor hissed, quickly looking around to make sure that no one was watching. Luckily the beach was empty, except for them. She turned back to her friend and stared at her, every part of her body tense and ready to pounce.

"Don't get your legs in a knot. I'm not here to attack you," Marissa said. Those words reassured Taylor for a reason unknown and she found herself marveling at her friend's beauty. If she was beautiful as a human, she was mesmerizing as a mermaid. All the features that hinted her mermaid side as a human now accentuated her beauty even more.

"So you're planning on tell her what you are," Marissa concluded, bringing Taylor out of her marveling.

"How do you feel?" Taylor began, surprised, but Marissa interrupted, "Isn't it obvious? You're leading her to a secluded part of a beach. You sure this is the right idea?"

"Of course," Taylor retorted, "She is the only family I have and I don't want to lie to her anymore."

"Really? Is that what you think or your so called new friends? You really think that Bella is just going to accept this?" Marissa asked, motioning down her body at her tail.

"She loves me," Taylor objected.

"How much can love compensate the weirdness? Bella is normal. She has never spent a thought about mermaids in her entire life. You really think she'll just accept it?" Marissa inquired.

Before Taylor could reply anything, Marissa submerged underwater.

Confused she stared. "Sorry, it took so long," Bella said as she came up behind Taylor, "Wow, that really is an amazing view. Is that an island back there? What's it called?"

"Mako Island," Taylor replied, getting up.

"So what is it that you wanted to tell me, sweetie?" Bella asked.

Taylor opened her mouth and then closed it again. Was she really doing the right thing? Her gaze fixated on Mako in the distance. Looking at the island made her draw up the images of Sarah, Emily, Amber and Rachel. She drew on that strength and took a deep breath.

"Is everything alright?" Bella questioned.

"Yeah. I think it might be easier to show you," Taylor answered, "And momâ€¦ I always considered you that, even if you aren't my real mother." Bella stared at Taylor confused as she took a step into the water and dove in. As she felt herself transform underwater, Taylor saw Marissa in the distance, a blank expression on her face. For a moment Taylor looked at the surface and then broke it, letting a wave guide her to shore back to Bella. When Bella's eyes fell on Taylor they widened and she only stared at her. Uncomfortably Taylor fidgeted under her gaze. Why wasn't she saying anything? After a while Taylor said, "Say something, anything."

Slowly Bella stepped forward and kneeled down beside Taylor, her knees getting wet. "I could never hate you. I will always love you, whether human or this," Bella finally said as she rested a hand on Taylor's, "How did this happen?"

After Taylor was dragged out of the water and had turned back to normal, they settled down on the beach. Taylor opened her mouth to begin, when she felt a surge of magic coming towards them. With her hand that was hidden by her body from Bella, Taylor send out her own invisible magic to push Marissa's magic, it had to be her magic, back. "Everything alright?" Bella asked, looking at her. Taylor simply nodded and began to explain, all the while trying to fend off Marissa's magic from causing a wave or something worse to happen that could hurt Bella.

As she told her story, leaving out Marissa once more, but including all of the others, Taylor felt her breath becoming labored and her magic running low. Silently she called out to the others. Suddenly she felt four more powers flow join her and Taylor felt four people in the area. They were there, but hiding.

All of the sudden, just as Taylor finished the story, Marissa's magic disappeared. Bella looked at Taylor. "That is an amazing story," she said, "I'm happy you told me."

"I was seriousâ€¦ When I said that I thought of you as my mother," Taylor replied.

"So you don't want to ever know who your real mother is?" Bella asked, carefully.

"No. The day she left dad and me is the day she died for me. She left

right after my birth and now you've taken that spot," Taylor answered and then remembered something, "You also had something you wanted to tell me?"

"It's not that important," Bella told her, "Plus I have to go. Rikki invited me to come along with the other mothers out for lunch." With a quick kiss on the cheek, Bella got up and left.

As soon as Bella was out of sight, Taylor turned around to look for her friends. True to her suspicion the four each came from different directions towards her. "You were spying on me?" Taylor accused them, a bit appalled.

"So what. Be glad that you did or you and Bella would be going to the hospital right now or drowning," Amber retorted. Taylor didn't reply to that.

"But it seems your mother took it well," Sarah said with a smile.

"She did," Taylor replied with a small smile, "Thanks for making me tell her."

"However I don't think we can leave Marissa alone any longer," Emily pointed out, making Taylor look up.

"What?" Taylor questioned, astonished.

"Taylor, she just attacked you and Bella. You seriously need more of a reason to take action?" Amber objected, "I can't believe I'm agreeing with you, Emily."

Pleadingly Taylor looked to Sarah, who looked away. "I know she's your friend, but we can't forever let her off the hook for it," Sarah said, "Taylor, we forgave you for lying about her, but we can't forgive Marissa, if really wants to hurt other people."

"Rachelâ€|," Taylor muttered, barely audible.

"Sorry," was all that she whispered, making her opinion obvious.

Taylor stopped to stare at her friends. Before her eyes she could see her saviors, her angels, turning into demons and although she had promised not to screw this up, she had no other choice. "I can't agree with you. I won't let you hurt Marissa." With that she ran off. It hurt. She felt as though a dagger had been rammed into her chest four times, each thrust more painful than the last. Had Marissa been right? Did they only do what was best for them and not all of them? No matter how whacked Marissa was, Taylor owed her everything and would never betray her.

* * *

><p>In Emma's house all four mothers had gathered. "So what is this all about?" Rikki asked, looking at Bella, who had called the meeting.<p>

"There is something I wish to tell you," Bella began as they had settled down at the kitchen table, "Taylor has told me today that she

and all of your daughters are mermaids."

"But then she also told you that we know this," Emily concluded, to which Bella nodded. The three mothers looked at Bella confused.

"That is not what I was going to tell you," Bella continued, "I came to Australia in hopes of finally finding the right moment to tell her. She seems more at home here than she ever was in Ireland, possibly because of her past. I was hoping you could help me explain it to her."

"What do you want to tell her so badly?" Cleo inquired, curiously.

Bella fidgeted a bit in her seat and then took a breath. "That I am her real mother," Bella confessed, lowering her eyes.

As the mothers stared at Bella astonished, one voice said, "What." Everyone turned to the speaker, their eyes wide with horror as they recognized the voice. In the doorway stood Taylor, her expression completely blank. "Say that again," Taylor told her in a shaking voice.

****A/N: ****The truth is out. Bella is Taylor's birth mother. Why did Bella leave Taylor? How will Taylor react? Please review.

17. Mother-daughter talk

****A/N: ****I tried to update last week, but this chapter was particularly hard to write, plus I wanted it to be good. Thus it's only here now. This season is slowly, but surely coming to an end. 4 or 5 more chapter, depending on if I find something to add. With this chapter we're one step closer to the finale. Finally Taylor's mysterious past is revealed. Thanks to all my readers and reviewers. Here is chapter 17. Enjoy!******

****Dknight27 and CelticH20** Seeing my story started before the third season, it isn't said if Bella is a mermaid or not, but maybe you'll find out more, if you read this chapter. ;)******

****Kathy** I can't say when the story will be finished, though I'm sure it'll be finished by the fall. It depends on how much time I have.****_Previously...** Taylor's mother appeared in Australia and the girls persuade Taylor to tell her about being a mermaid. Even though Marissa tries to stop her, Taylor does it and Bella calmly accepts the truth. However the girls argue with Taylor over Marissa and they break apart. Finally Bella confesses to Cleo, Rikki and Emma something. Now on to the chapter.
>

Chapter 17: Mother-daughter talk

"That I am her real mother," Bella confessed, lowering her eyes to not look into the eyes of her peers.

As the mothers stared at Bella astonished, one voice said, "What." Everyone turned to the speaker, their eyes wide with horror as they recognized the voice. In the doorway stood Taylor, her expression

completely blank. "Say that again," Taylor told her in a shaking voice.

Bella felt herself choking up. How many years she had wanted to say those words to her. Say those words, explain everything and be embraced. Now everything had gone south. "Taylor," Bella whispered, but Taylor repeated, firmly, "Say that again."

"I'mâ€| your birth mother," Bella confessed, her voice shaking.

Taylor's form stood in the doorway for a moment, shaking, but then she suddenly stormed forward, her hand raised. A split second later the sound of skin meeting skin filled the room and the gasp of Cleo, Emma and Rikki followed soon after. Bella held her cheek, which was quickly turning bright red. Lucky for her Taylor had hesitated a fraction of a second which lessened the impact. The teenager was breathing heavily and tears were partially obscuring her sight. She was torn by the amount of emotions coursing through her. Anger, rage, betrayal, sadness, disbelief. If there was any joy of finding her real mother, it had drowned in the other emotions.

As a child she had often imagined what it would be like when she finally met her mother. Never had it been like this. Taylor had dreamed of a loving mother with a good reason for leaving her or many other situations, but she had stopped dreaming such fantasies when she had been adopted by Bella and Will. Bella became her mother, but now she turned out to be her real mother. Finding her birth mother, Taylor always thought it would be a joyous occasion, instead all she felt right now was pain. Pain and betrayal.

"How could you?" she asked, her voice shaking and with halts coming between each word.

"Taylor, please, let me explain," Bella begged, having recovered from the slap as she got up, taking a step toward her daughter.

Taylor stepped back, yelling, "Why should I listen to you! Apparently all you've done to me is lie! Why would this time be any different?"

"Taylor, it wasn't easy for me to keep it from you. After I left you I always thought of you," Bella replied.

"Then why did you abandon me to begin with," Taylor spat, her voice a hiss. The words stabbed Bella in the heart, no matter how loud they would have been spoken.

"Taylor," four voices chorused, once more from the doorway. The group turned to find Sarah, Amber, Emily and Rachel standing there, obviously shocked at what they just heard. Only Taylor and Bella ignored their entrance, still in a stalemate staring at each other.

"What's going on here?" Sarah whispered as they stepped next to their mothers. None of the mothers dared speak up in the tense atmosphere.

As if Bella wanted to answer Sarah, she began to explain, "Your father and I had been together since high school. We loved each

other, but Rory hadn't been prepared for the harsh world outside of school. In a sense he was the stereotypical jock, who thought of nothing else except for sports during school. After we graduated I went off to college, while Rory became lost in the real world. His grades weren't good enough for college and he had no goals in life. After a few botched jobs he followed me to the city, where we lived together and he tried to find permanent work. As time went by I finished college and got my first job at a good firm, but the relationship between Rory and I was strained. It was tiring to always keep up with his constant nagging of how the world was against him."

"Don't act like everything that went wrong back then is because of dad," Taylor retorted, "Sure he wasn't perfect, but at least he didn't desert me." Bella knew that what she was saying was harsh, but the truth. Since it had been found out, she intended on being a bit more honest about a few things, even if they weren't pretty.

"I would never say that, Taylor. I still loved your father and then you came along. It was a big surprise for us and threw us for a loop. I didn't feel ready to have a child, especially with my work at that point. Also I had the only solid income and more than often Rory and I fought, maybe because my hormones were going crazy, I don't know," Bella continued.

"So now I'm the reason everything went down hill?" Taylor inquired, angrily, "It sure is odd that everyone else seems to be at fault, but never you."

"I'm not blaming anyone, especially not a baby," Bella answered, feebly.

"Then tell me this," Taylor ordered, though calm, but tense, "Did you think of abortion?" Bella stared at her daughter, shocked at the question.

"Taylor," Rachel interrupted her friend, "Why don't you let your mother finish?" Rachel had felt her heart tighten as the conversation had advanced, recognizing so much that had gone wrong between her and her own mother. Back then she could have only dreamed of having such a heart to heart from her mother, no matter how unfortunate the truth was.

"Shut up," Taylor snapped. Amber was about to speak up when Bella shook her head slightly. No one was to interfere. Everyone understood that signal.

Bella took a deep breath, repeating in her head, "The truth, the truth." She tried to reassure herself. Finally replied, softly, "Yes. At the very beginning I thought about it."

Although she had feared the answer, Taylor no longer cared. Her whole life already laid around her in pieces. So many pieces that it would be impossible to put it back together, no matter how much glue was used. There was nothing left to break, but still tears welled up in Taylor's eyes as she hissed, "Monster."

"But you know why I didn't do it?" Bella went on, "Because the moment I saw you on an ultrasound, I fell in love with you."

"Then why did you abandon me?" Taylor asked, glaring at her.

"After you were born I just felt overwhelmed and exhausted. I never seemed to do anything right, whether it was taking care of you or something else. The longer I stayed with you the sadder I was and the guiltier I felt for not being able to take care of you properly. Your father seemed to leave me more and more alone. It piled up and I couldn't take it any longer. I took all of my vacation and after I wrote a quick note to Rory, I fled," Bella told her, "It wasn't until later that I realized that I had postnatal depression, a depression that sometimes women get after giving birth. On my vacation I met Will and I fell in love with him. We started a life together. Believe me though there wasn't a day that went by when I didn't think of you, but I did feel that I had left you in the capable hands of your father. He loved you dearly." Bella saw Taylor's eyes soften for a moment before they became hard again.

"That may be, but did you ever even consider what you put dad through?" Taylor demanded, "It's your fault dad became the way he did and that he lost custody of me!" Bella had nothing to reply to that. She knew all too well that Rory had probably been crushed by her sudden disappearance, though she had never expected it to turn out this way. She couldn't admit it to Taylor, but back then their relationship had been very one-sided with Rory clinging to her as his lifeline. Bella had had the feeling of being suffocated and couldn't take it anymore on top of her depression. Maybe she had hoped that her disappearance would have caused Rory to clean up his act. Instead it seemed to have the opposite effect with drinking and even more joblessness, all the way until he lost Taylor, probably the hardest blow ever for him. Bella knew Rory had loved Taylor dearly and his smiling face when he first laid eyes on her would forever be etched into her memories.

"Do you know what it's like when your first memory is a dark dorm room filled with unhappy children?" Taylor suddenly asked, breaking Bella from her memories.

"I know no amount of apologize could ever undo what you had to go through, but I came as soon as I heard of what happened to you," Bella answered.

"It took you ten years to care what had happened to your only child?" Taylor questioned with disdain.

"No, I went looking for you much earlier, but I was unable to find any trace of you or your father. It wasn't until I returned to Rockport where Rory and I grew up that I found you by chance," Bella explained.

"By chance?" Taylor repeated. "I saw you by the ocean," Bella replied, but suddenly her mouth clamped shut, as Taylor eyed her suspiciously.

"Oceanâ€¦," Taylor muttered, dryly, "The only time when I was by the ocean was whenâ€¦ I was a mermaid." Her eyes raised to meet her mother's, who had guilt written all over them.

"You knew all along that I was a mermaid," Taylor stated, emotionless.

"Yes," Bella admitted, meekly.

"But no normal person would just ignore the fact, even if it was their daughter. The only reason you would have not to speak to me about it isâ€¦," Taylor concluded as the gaze fell on the group of Australian mermaids and their mothers, "If you were once a mermaid yourself." Now Cleo, Rikki and Emma couldn't help but stare. There was another one just like them. A mermaid who lost her power to her daughter.

Bella remembered the fateful day well. Closing her eyes, she felt the sun on her face, the breeze in her hair and the sound of waves crashing onto the beach.

_Bella walked barefoot down the beach, her thoughts still on the reunion with an old friend from high school days. She hadn't been able to tell her anything on Rory's whereabouts. No one, for that matter, who had known Rory seemed to know anything about where he was now. It seemed hopeless. _

_As her thoughts on where to search next revolved inside her head, she subconsciously wandered towards the moon pool. How many years had it been since she had been there? Far too many. 10 since she had lost her powers altogether. Curiosity of what had happened to the moon pool overcame her and she hurried to the land opening, even though she knew she was late to a meeting with Will, who had been wandering around town, while she met old friends. _

_Bella was about to enter the cavern, when she heard water splashing and not the type of splashing that came from the typical waves. Carefully she peeked around the corner and her breath caught in her lungs. In the moon pool was a mermaid, but not just any mermaid. The spitting image of her younger self. Tears were threatening to roll down her cheeks. There was no mistake about it. Her search was over.

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The little mermaid, Taylor, looked up at the sun and said, "I guess it's time to go back to the foster house." Sadness carried in her voice. With a final sigh, she submerged and swam out of the underwater entrance. Bella stumbled into the cavern and slumped against a wall. She could only stare at the spot were Taylor had been only seconds before. It was really her. Her hand went to her neck, wanting to grasp her necklace with the blue moon pool stone on it that she had worn so often back in the day, but then remembered she had stopped wearing it, once her right to it had been taken. Then it hit her. Taylor had said foster home.

The dread that had filled Bella back then still made her shudder today. "I went straight to the foster home with Will to get you," Bella continued, "There I found out about your past. I beat myself up about not being there for you and I grew afraid to meet you, not knowing how you would react. The foster home suggested that I first pretend to be your aunt, because they feared how you might react, if I told you the truth from the start, and I agreed, having no idea how to tell you. Plus I knew you would be withdrawn due to being a mermaid. I intended on telling you later, but the right moment never came. This is one of the reasons I came to the Gold Coast. I wanted to explain this to you away from our known environment, but definitely not like this. Taylor, I'm sorry you had to find out this way."

The kitchen was dead silent. No one seemed to breath. Everyone's eyes were on Taylor. What would she say? "Say something," Bella pleaded, "Taylor."

"So you only took me in because I was a mermaid," Taylor spat, furiously.

Bella stared at her daughter, heart broken. "No, I would have taken you in, even if you were a normal human," Bella objected.

"Are you sure about that?" Taylor inquired, eying her mother hard, "Or did you only take me in in hopes of making you feel less guilty about abandoning me? Well here's news for you. I would have rather stayed in the foster home than live together with you! You are the worst parent ever!" With that statement Taylor turned on her heel, broke through her group of friends behind her and ran outside, slamming the door shut behind her.

Everything seemed to be frozen. No one in the room dared move. It wasn't until Bella slumped in her chair that the others finally found themselves again. "What have I done," she whispered into her palms, "I messed up everything."

"It was unfortunate timing," Cleo tried to comfort her, patting her shoulder.

"I'm sure she'll come around eventually," Emma assured her as she placed an ice pack on Bella's still red cheek.

"Even Amber and I make up, although we butt heads quite a bit," Rikki added. Bella mustered a small smile. She knew they were trying to make her feel better and she felt thankful for that, but there was little they could say for their goal to actually be achieved. The worst part for Bella was that she knew that every single word that had been thrown at her just now was deserved.

Then her gaze fell on Taylor's friends, who just stood there. "Can't you go talk to her? There is no way she'll listen to anything I say at this point in time," Bella asked in a hopeful voice, making the four break free from their trance.

"We would gladly try to talk to her, even if you hadn't asked," Rachel began, hesitantly.

"But the problem is that just before Taylor came here we had an argument with her," Emily continued.

"About what?" Bella inquired.

"About Marissa," Sarah answered.

"Marissa?" Bella repeated confused, "What does Marissa have to do with all this?" In a brief summary the girls explained the situation with Marissa. "I had no idea Marissa was also a mermaid," Bella muttered in disbelief.

"That's why we think there is little chance that she'll listen to anything we say right now," Amber concluded.

"I would go," a voice spoke up. The group turned to the other door to find James standing there. None of them had noticed his entrance and no one knew how much he had heard, but they assumed it was enough to get the gist of it. "The problem is that as a mermaid Taylor is probably somewhere where I can't go," James pointed out.

"Thank you, all of you," Bella said, wirily as she looked around the group, "Taylor is very fortunate to have found such a great group of people here, who care so much about her, but maybe we should let Taylor come back on her own, once she feels ready. I'm sure by tomorrow morning she'll be back. There is no way she would turn her back on such a great group of people. Call me as soon as she does." Bella got up and left, probably to go to Rikki's house. The other mothers followed to have some peace and quiet while they talked to Bella. James also took his exit quietly.

The girls looked at each other, unsure of what to do. "I can't go home not knowing, if Taylor is alright," Rachel finally said.

"Why don't we stay up and wait for her," Emily suggested and the four settled down on the couch.

"That was a lot to take in," Sarah muttered. "I feel sorry for Taylor, though I think a lot of rage clouded her judgment, due to the way she found out about all this. If it had been different, maybe Taylor would still be here. Not pleased, but here," Amber replied, looking at the last vacant spot on the couch.

"I can understand her rage for being lied to, but I feel sorry for Bella. It wasn't easy and she was only beaten up for her confession," Rachel said.

"It was a real shock to find out that Bella was a mermaid once too," Sarah pointed out, trying to change the subject a bit.

"A big shock and hopefully our mothers are explaining her lose of powers to her," Emily added.

"They'll have a lot of talking to do," Amber agreed, "But hopefully it'll take her mind of all this. Not just Bella's, but all of ours."

"Lets hope that Taylor finds a way too," Rachel whispered as she looked out the window towards the ocean. They continued to talk for a long time, curled up on the couch.

* * *

><p>Slowly Rachel woke up. Rubbing the sleep out of her eyes, she saw that the rest of the girls were still asleep. Waiting for Taylor they had ultimately fallen asleep. Emily hung half over the arm of the sofa. Amber leaned against her friend, her head resting Emily's shoulder. Sarah rested on the other arm of the couch. Rachel suspected that she had cuddled up with Sarah, seeing her arm was around her. Rachel turned her head, trying to figure out why she had woken up in the first place. Finally she saw the figure of a person standing on the porch outside. Taylor, who was too afraid to come in after last night?<p>

As quickly as she dared, Rachel undid her arm from under Sarah's

sleeping form, trying not to wake her, and then silently stepped towards the backdoor. Her high spirits were crushed as she reached the door. She opened the door and moved next to the figure. "You can't sleep?" Rachel asked, eying the color changing sky. Dawn would be upon them soon.

"Only had a wink of sleep," James answered, his eyes also not leaving the horizon, "I waited for her the whole night, but she didn't come. I'm really worried." His eyes had bags under them, Rachel noted, and his clothes were still the same as yesterday, wrinkled from being in them all night.

"Me too," Rachel said, "Especially since it's partially my fault. If I had stuck up for her yesterday with Marissa, then maybeâ€¦"

"Then you think the news from last night would have impacted her differently? You can't blame yourself for this," James objected.

"Still, aside from her mother and Marissa, we are the two people closest to Taylor," Rachel told him, "If anyone can help her in this situation, it's us. We should look for her."

"Although I agree with you, where do we start? The Gold Coast is huge, plus Taylor is a mermaid, thus our search parameters just tripled or something like that," James pointed out.

"But there is one place that can comfort all mermaids," Rachel replied, her eyes fixating on a spot in the distance. Without following Rachel's gaze, James knew exactly what she meant.

The two got into the speed boat that the three families owned together, which was docked at the Emily's house, and made their way to Mako Island before the sun had really risen yet. Rachel led the way to the land entrance to the moon pool, seeing James hadn't been there often enough. As they enter the cavern, they half expected to see Taylor in her mermaid form floating in the water or possibly curled up in a ball against the wall. Instead they found the dormant volcano completely empty with no sign of anyone ever being there.

Distraught Rachel looked around. "I guess you were wrong," James said, trying to say it as nicely as possible. She couldn't believe it, no she wouldn't believe it. All her senses had told her that Taylor would be here, so why wasn't she. Rachel hurried to the moon pool and dropped on her hands and knees to look at its bottom. Nothing. Taylor really wasn't here. She fought against the tears as she bit down on her lip.

Suddenly the rock under Rachel's hands gave way and she tumbled head first into the water. The instant her body touched the water, it felt as though lightning coursed through her veins. She would have cried out, if she could, but the shock froze her muscles for the moment. The weird tingling feeling she had felt for a while whenever she touched water had evolved into a painful shock. Thrashing about Rachel tried anything to get the feeling to stop or to get out of the water, but instead it stayed the same and she started to panic.

A firm hand suddenly grasped her arm and a split second later Rachel was pulled from the water. Her entire body shook as the adrenaline

slowly left her blood system. Finally she was able to actually comprehend what she was looking at, which was James' worried face. "You alright?" he asked. Rachel simply nodded as she realized that her head was resting against James' shoulder. "What happened?" James questioned, "I thought you were able to hold your breath for a long time."

"A rock broke loose underneath me and I panicked," Rachel half lied. She hadn't told anyone of the tingling feeling, well now shock, that she got when she touched water.

"So this is how it is," an acidly voice said from behind. Instantly they recognized the voice and spun around. Their eyes fell on Taylor, who stood at the entrance, her look like ice. "So I'm gone for a night and my friend and my boyfriend hook up together in a place that should never be entered by humans," she told them, practically spitting out the last word.

"Taylor," Rachel whispered, shocked, moving away from James.

"It's not like that," James objected, getting up to walk towards her.

"You humans are all the same. Liars, doing whatever as long as you profit from it," Taylor sneered, "And once you're caught, you try to bend everything back into place with more lies."

"That's not true, Taylor and you know it," Rachel protested from her spot on the ground.

"I know you're hurting, Taylor, but you can't take it out onâ€¦," James began, but Taylor interrupted, "We're through James. I have no more need for you."

"You can't mean that," James muttered in disbelief, closing the distance between them in a few quick strides, "After all that we've beenâ€¦"

"Don't touch me, you low life!" Taylor yelled and pulled James back.

Surprised he stumbled and fell. As James fell he extended his right arm to break the fall. Hitting the ground, a sharp pain went through his wrist and he let out a cry of pain. "James! Are you alright?" Rachel asked as she scampered towards him and then looked up, "Look what you've done, Tayâ€¦" She froze when she realized that Taylor was no longer there.

Cradling his injured wrist, James sat up. "I'll be fine," he answered, "But Tayloraâ€¦"

"I believe Taylor has made her opinion quite clear," a voice behind them spoke up. This time the voice instilled fear as they turned around to face Marissa, who had surfaced in the moon pool. Rachel swallowed hard as she moved so that she was between the injured James and the mermaid, though she knew it was a futile act. All three knew that if Marissa decided to attack there was nothing Rachel could do to stop her. "This is a fair warning," Marissa said, "Stay away from Taylor. She's with me now." With that Marissa submerged again, leaving the two to stare at the pool.

****A/N:** ****A** bomb has been dropped on Taylor's life and now she sides with Marissa. Will the girls be able to bring Taylor back on the right side or will Taylor, together with her old childhood friend, try to overrun the humans? Can the girls even stand up to the combined power of the two Irish mermaids? Please review.

18. Searching

****A/N:** After a short vacation I'm back and my creative juices are flowing. I'm glad Taylor's feelings in the last chapter are understandable. I was a bit worried that they were, well I guess, not understandable. Thanks for reading and reviewing everyone. Here is chapter 18. Enjoy!******

Previously... Bella finally tells the full truth. She is Taylor's real mother. Taylor feels betrayed and runs away, while Bella blames herself. The next day James and Rachel go and search for Taylor, only to find that she had completely turned on them and is now working with Marissa. James is injured by Taylor, who breaks up with him. Now on to the chapter.

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Chapter 18: Searching

"She really didn't come back," Sarah whispered, staring at the cup of coffee in front of her. Although she was dead tired and she knew how much the caffeinated beverage would help, she couldn't bring herself to drink it. Same could be said for Emily and Amber. All three sat at the kitchen table in Emily's house, coffee in front of them.

"Don't worry," Emily replied, putting her arm around Sarah's shoulder, "She'll come back."

"Where do you think Rachel went off to?" Amber asked, looking around the rooms and bringing up another worry of theirs. The two shrugged. When they had woken up, Rachel was gone with no trace of where or when she left. They simply assumed she had gone home, after realizing that Taylor hadn't returned yet.

"Don't look so down, you three," Emma told them as she walked into the kitchen.

"How can you say that? We have no idea where Taylor is right now," Amber retorted.

"Good friends always find back to one another," Emma said, ignoring Amber's tone.

"I wouldn't be too sure about that," a voice spoke up, making the four look to the door. There stood Rachel, James right behind her.

"Rachel," the three mermaids said, confused, "What do you mean?"

"James and I went to search for Taylor," Rachel explained as she stepped forward.

"And?" Sarah questioned, anxiously.

"Listen, can we first take care of James," Rachel cut off their curiosity.

"James?" Emily repeated, but then her eyes fell on the wrist he cradled, which looked slightly swollen, "What happened?" While Emily and Emma took care of James' wrist, Rachel told them what had happened in the moon pool only moments before, though she generously omitted what happened in the moon pool to her.

"She's with Marissa!" Amber exclaimed, jumping up from her chair, "I don't believe it!"

"This is not the time to get angry, Amber. We have to find Taylor and talk to her," Emily retorted.

"You really think that's going to help?" Amber questioned.

"She's confused, Amber. How would you feel, if you found out what she just did? We're her friends and we need to get her back on track," Sarah answered as she stared hard at Amber, who reciprocated her gaze. Finally Amber shrugged and sat back down, admitting her defeat.

"I suggest we split up. We cover more ground that way," Emily told her.

"Isn't that too dangerous? If we get attacked by Marissa or Taylor we'll have no chance on our own," Sarah protested.

"What if we try to stick to places where there are at least a few people in the area? It would be even too risky for Marissa to attack us where people are. We already checked Mako, so there is no way they'll be there again," Rachel suggested, "I doubt they'll be in the ocean the whole day, so they must have a land base somewhere."

"We should still check Mako and the area. You never know," Amber objected, "And after that we can meet up with our search partners."

"Who is that?" Sarah asked, confused.

"I think you know who," Amber smiled, mischievously as she took out her cell phone. The three others got her drift.

"So what about me?" Rachel asked.

"I'll go with you," James spoke up as he rose from his chair.

"What about your wrist?" Emily questioned, "You should rest it."

"I have to see Taylor," was the only thing he said.

Emily was about to speak up once more, when Emma said, "Let him go, Emily. There is nothing you can say or do to stop him."

Emily looked from her mother to James and then nodded her head in resignation. "Fine," Emily replied, "We'll go search Mako and the ocean and then meet up with our search teams. Rachel, you and James

start with the city." Everyone nodded, saying they understood the plan.

With that they stepped outside. "We'll contact each other, if we find anything," Sarah said and with that she, Amber and Emily dove into the water.

"I guess we should get going too," Rachel told James and turned to walk to the street.

"Doesn't it annoy you at times?" James questioned.

"What?" Rachel replied, confused.

"That not being a mermaid excludes you from things," James said, making Rachel stare at him, "You can't really swim with them anymore and what not."

Rachel slowly came to a stop, forcing James to do the same. Her gaze fixed on a non-existent spot a long way down the street. "I would be lying, if I said it didn't bother me," she began, slowly, "When I first lost my powers I felt like I didn't belong anymore. That I had no right to be with your sister and the rest. However they did their best to encourage me not to give up. Still I felt myself drift away from them."

"What did you do?" James inquired.

"I told myself it was for the better. Although I haven't had a lapse of memory in the past year, I always fear that a part of the evil spirit is still inside me, just waiting for the right moment to strike. As the year passed I grew accustomed to my self-protective isolation. It wasn't until I met Taylor that that shield finally crumbled. She probably doesn't know it, but in my eyes she saved me from loneliness," Rachel told him, "That is why I have to find Taylor and bring her back, no matter what it costs. I owe her that much."

James nodded solemnly. "Let's go," was all he said as he walked on.

Rachel stared after him for a moment, thinking. Lately her fear of the evil spirit had been coming back and all because of that weird feeling or now shock she was getting every time she touched water. The thought that perhaps a fragment of that spirit still resided in her made Rachel shake with fear and almost wish that she hadn't survived the attack back then. "Everything alright?" James asked, looking back at her.

Rachel broke from her thoughts and nodded. "Everything is fine," Rachel assured him with a smile, "I think I might know a place to start."

A while later they arrived at the beach café Sierra worked at. As usual she was busy hurrying from kitchen to one of the tables and back. When she saw them, her eyes widened in recognition. "You're James and Emily," Sierra paused for a moment, trying to remember the name, "Rachel. How are you two?"

"Okay," James replied.

Before Rachel could ask if Taylor was here, Sierra questioned, "Have you seen Taylor? She was supposed to work today." That answered that question. Taylor hadn't been here.

"She's not feeling well. She send us to tell you that," Rachel lied, not wanting her to get into trouble.

"Oh, well I hope she gets better soon," Sierra replied, "Maybe the planet is effecting her."

"The planet?" Rachel repeated, confused.

"Yeah, Neptune is going to be perfectly aligned with the moon and earth today. It's a fairly rare phenomenon," Sierra explained, but then smiled sheepishly, "Sorry, this must be totally boring for you. I'm into astronomy."

Suddenly a customer called to Sierra, "Miss, something is wrong with my drink." Sierra hurried to him. From afar James and Rachel could tell what the problem was. His drink had been turned to jelly. Slowly more and more voiced their problems of jellified drinks. The two stared at each other. There could only be two people who did this. Quickly they hurried to balustrade and looked towards the ocean. Out in the ocean they saw a head popping out of the water. Taylor. An evil smile spread across her face when she saw them. Then she dove under. Slowly the two could hear the complaints going back.

Rachel was about to ask where to go next when her phone rang. "Helloâ€| Oh, hey Danielâ€| What! Emily never showed. Okay, I'll ask the others. Bye," Rachel said and hung up her phone. James looked at her worried. Instead of saying anything, she first dialed Ryan's and then Jordan's number. Both calls brought up the same answer. James' gaze was now steely as Rachel finally looked up. "None of them ever showed up," she told him, gravely. They exchange a look. Something was wrong.

* * *

><p>Meanwhile Amber, Sarah and Emily were swimming to Mako. They zigzagged through the water, keeping in eye out for Marissa or Taylor, all the while making sure that they still had visual on the other two. They finally reached Mako with no disturbances. They found the moon pool empty. Slowly they got out of the water and search the cave and its entrance. It really was empty. "Looks like Rachel was right. They left," Amber pointed out.<p>

"Better safe than sorry," Emily replied.

"I guess we should go meet Ryan and the others," Sarah said.

"You plan on leaving my company so soon?" a voice asked, making the girls whirl around. Standing at the edge of the moon pool stood Marissa. The three girls stepped back. "Now, now, you aren't scared of me, are you? You are the ones who came looking for me, if I remember correctly," Marissa teased them.

"Where is Taylor? What have you done with her?" Amber demanded to know.

"Taylor is currently attending to some personal business. I'm sure she'll join us soon though," Marissa told them, "Why don't you take a seat and wait?" With a snap of her wrist she sent a gust of air towards the girl, crashing them into the wall. They collapsed onto the ground. In pain they looked up at Marissa. "Don't worry. I won't kill you. Yet. Taylor probably has some things to talk about with you. Until then allow me to play with you." She stepped towards them, an evil glint in her eyes.

* * *

><p>James and Rachel hurried to Emma's house. As they came crashing into the living room, they found all four mothers sitting on the couch. Surprised they looked up. "What's going on?" Emma asked.<p>

"Marissa and Taylor have them. They captured Sarah, Emily and Amber," Rachel gasped as the two quickly regaled the tale. All the mothers paled when the story was over.

"This is all my fault," Bella whispered, her head in her hands, "If I hadn't been so careless, Taylor wouldn't have found out and wouldn't have hooked up with Marissa."

"No, it's not," Cleo objected, firmly, grasping her hand, "Marissa would have made a move anyway."

"It doesn't matter whose fault it is," Rikki interrupted them, getting up from the couch, "We need to save them."

"And how do you propose we do that?" Emma inquired, "In case you forgot, we lost our powers over 20 years ago."

Cleo's gaze went from Emma to Rikki and then fell on Rachel. "Can't you help them?" she asked, a pleading tone in her voice.

All the other mothers' heads shot up. Rachel looked to the side and whispered, "I wish I could, but the magic I get from the necklace is too weak. Marissa alone had been too much for us five and now with Taylor on her side, there is little chance we can stop them. There is no way my power would be enough to stop them." She saw the disappointment in the mothers' eyes just as much as she felt it. How much Rachel wished at that moment that she was still a mermaid with her full powers and not just a human with her measly necklace.

"There has to be a way," Rikki said, hurrying out the door to the docks adjoined to the backyard. Her gaze fell on Mako Island and her fists clenched. The other mothers followed, each wanting just as much to help their daughters. James and Rachel tailed them. Seeing the mothers stare at Mako with such fear and worry in their eyes, Rachel wished more than ever that she could do something, anything, to help her friends. Subconsciously she gripped her necklace with the three moon pool stones on it. They felt oddly hot in her hand. It gave her an idea.

"I know me alone won't be enough to help them, butâ€¦," she began to explain as she unfastened her necklace and the mothers turned to face her, "Maybe you are. I know the magic won't be any stronger, but maybe you three can do something that I can't." Rachel took the

stones from her necklace and placed them in her open hand. "I'm sure you'll know what to do," Rachel told them as she handed each their respective stone. Although she couldn't say why or how, seeing they all looked alike from the outside, she knew exactly which stone contained what magic. It was as if she felt the presence of her friends in them. The first stone, which she gave to Emma, had Emily's magic and felt cold somehow. The second had Sarah's magic, feeling like water flowed over her palm, Rachel handed to Cleo. The last felt almost too hot to hold and was definitely Amber's, thus being handed to Rikki.

The mothers stared at the moon stones. "Thank you," Cleo said.

"But can we even use them? We are no longer mermaids," Emily asked and was answered in silence. Suddenly a bright light shone down upon them.

* * *

><p>Marissa was almost upon them when Sarah asked, "What did you tell Taylor to make her join you?"<p>

"I didn't tell her anything. I think her mother did a pretty good job of showing what humans are really capable of," Marissa answered.

"It was never meant to happen like that," Emily objected.

"But in the end it did and that's what counts," Marissa smirked and sighed, "I'm tired of waiting. I guess I'll get rid of you after all. Should I give Taylor a last message from you?" Marissa raised her hand towards Sarah, Amber and Emily, whose eyes widened in fear. They huddled together on the floor.

"I don't think that's necessary, Marissa," a voice spoke up and a moment later Taylor entered through the land entrance.

The three girls on the ground stared at their friend, but all they got was a cold, empty gaze. This was their Taylor? "Taylor, we're here to bring you back," Sarah said.

"Who asked you to? I'm quite happy where I am right now," Taylor retorted, her arms crossed as she took her place next to Marissa, towering over them.

"Your mother is really sorry you found out this way. She wants to talk to you," Emily told her.

"My mother abandoned me. I mean nothing to her and she means nothing to me!" Taylor spat.

"Every daughter means something to their mother. Maybe you don't see eye to eye, but she still cares for you more than anything," Amber spoke up.

"I hate my mother!" Taylor screamed at the top of her lungs, making the captives flinch.

"I think it's about time we end this," Marissa said as she used her magic to make a tentacle of water into three spears, "You have the honors."

Taylor turned to her friend, astonished. "This is not what we agreed on," she objected.

"But it's necessary," Marissa hissed, "They will always stand in our way, no matter what we do." Taylor's gaze went from Marissa to the three on the ground and finally to the spears floating in front of her.

"Don't do it, Taylor," Sarah whispered, "You're not like this."

Taylor stared at them and finally hissed, "How do you know what I'm like?" With that she turned the water spears solid, the tip now as sharp as could be.

"I'm sorry, but I don't think we can allow that," a voice said and a split second later the spears were crashed against the wall, where they shattered.

All five pairs of eyes wandered to the moon pool and widened. "Oh my god," Sarah whispered, her eyes wide and her hand covering her open mouth.

"How did this happen?" Emily asked, astonished.

"You're kidding me, right," Amber whispered, her eyes as big as saucers.

"What is the meaning of this!" Marissa exclaimed, furiously, while Taylor was simply shocked. In the moon pool were three mermaids. Cleo, Emma and Rikki. They looked exactly like they did all those years ago, except that they were of course older.

Rikki balled her fist and steam arose and a split second later they stood on the sand as humans. "So you're Marissa," Emma said, eying the enemy, "We kindly suggest you stay away from our daughters or you'll regret it."

The three stepped forward. "You're not so high and mighty now that it's six against two, are you?" Rikki smiled.

"Are you really threatening me?" Marissa questioned with a laugh, "You'll regret this."

"Will we?" Cleo smirked as she raised a gust of wind and knocked Marissa and Taylor to the ground. Marissa's eyes darkened and she created several more spears, which she sent towards the mothers. Emma froze some while Rikki struck the others down with lightning. However they missed one and were forced to jump to the side, barely in time to dodge them.

Marissa smiled evilly as she now aimed many spears at her six hostages. "A valiant effort, but an effort it will remain. Now where were we before we were so rudely interrupted?" she asked, "Oh yeah. Go ahead Taylor. Make them pay."

"This has gone too far, Marissa," Taylor protested, "They're innocent."

"If they're in our way, they are not innocent," Marissa objected, "Do it."

Taylor's gaze fell on the hostages. Each mother had her daughter in their arm, protectively putting their body in front of their daughters'. As she turned the spears solid, Taylor asked, "Why are you doing this?"

"You mean besides putting a stop to your sick plan?" Rikki retorted, "We love our daughters and are going to do anything in our power to save them."

"Your mother is no different," Cleo continued, "Every mother loves their daughter, no matter what."

"Bella said to give you this," Emma told her and pulled from her pocket. A ring on a chain. It was made of plastic that looked gold and a pink heart shaped bead was set in it. It was a cheap ring that anyone could get out of one of those machines in front of a supermarket. Taylor's eyes widened as she realized what was in front of her. She had really kept it all these years.

"Why are you stalling?" Marissa demanded to know, breaking Taylor from her trance, "Get it over with!"

Taylor just stood there for a moment and then turned to friend. "I can't do it," she said.

"What?" Marissa asked.

"I'm sorry, Marissa. I can't do it. I won't let the few people that care so much about me that they would walk into certain doom," Taylor answered, firmly.

Marissa stared at her friend. "You're going to regret this, Taylor. Mark my words. You will regret choosing their side." Before anyone could stop her, Marissa dove into the water and disappeared. Taylor stared after her friend, her breath shaking. Finally all the tension left her body and she dropped to the ground, the spears turning back to liquid in the process. The mothers and daughters stared at the scene before them. It was really over. Slowly the daughters entwined from their mothers, went over to Taylor and hugged her. Their presence and silence was more comforting than any words that could be said.

****A/N: ****In the last second Taylor chose good over bad, but will her actions up until then be forgiven? How did Cleo, Emma and Rikki transform and what is that ring? Please review.

19. Apologies

****A/N:** Wow over 100 reviews! You guys are the best audience an author could want. Thank you to all readers and reviewers who have made this series a success. Here is chapter 19. Enjoy!******

****I**LoveIceCream Father/daughter stuff would be possible, but brother/sister would be harder, seeing the Ethan is still a baby and can't really interact, leaving only Emily and James as the only brother/sister pair.******

_Italics mean a flashback.
>

Previously... Everyone is worried about Taylor and goes off to search for her. Sarah, Amber and Emily are cornered by Marissa and Taylor would have killed them, if their mothers as mermaids hadn't shown up. Taylor refuses Marissa, who then runs off. Now on to the chapter.

Chapter 19: Apologies

It seemed like an eternity before any of them spoke up. "Are you alright, Taylor?" Sarah asked, looking at the blond in the middle of their embrace. Taylor simply nodded. She couldn't even look at them, she was so ashamed. The call had been too close. Everything had gone down hill. Her muscles felt like they weighed a ton and every movement seemed almost impossible. Simply breathing was a task nearly too hard to do.

"That was too close," Amber breathed, speaking aloud what Taylor thought.

"If you hadn't shown upâ€¦," Emily began, facing her mother, but then remembered what they had seen, "How is this possible?"

The three mothers exchanged a look and shrugged. "We're not really sure ourselves," Emma admitted, "Though Rachel has a hypotheses how this is possible."

"Rachel?" the three daughters repeated, "What does this have to do with Rachel?" The mothers each held up a hand with a blue moon stone in it. They instantly recognized them. They were Taylor's.

The mothers thought back to the events that just shortly before had taken place.

_Rachel looked at the mothers as they now all held the stones. The mothers stared at the moon stones. "Thank you," Cleo said. _

_ "But can we even use them? We are no longer mermaids," Emily asked with doubt and was answered in silence. Suddenly a bright light shone down upon them._

_When the bright light disappeared, the group stared at each other. "What was that about?" Rikki asked, looking around. _

The others shrugged. "It doesn't matter we have to hurry," Emma retorted and the three walked over to the speed boat, boarding it. Unfortunately they didn't balance properly, all of them having moved to one side of the boat, causing it to tip over. With a cry of surprise they fell into the water.

_Sputtering they came to the surface. "Now I know why we were mermaids," Cleo said, sarcastically, "Because we can't even board a boat without it capsizing." _

_ "Are you alright?" James asked, looking at the women in the water. Before any of them could reply, the water around them started to bubble. Confused and slightly afraid the mothers looked around for

the cause. Suddenly an all too familiar feeling ran through their bodies, completely enrapturing their bodies. They went under. "Mom!" James exclaimed and would have jumped after them, if Rachel hadn't grasped his arm. _

_"Don't," Rachel objected. Although she could explain what was going on, she knew it wasn't bad. _

_"Let go," James demanded, pulling away from her grip, "I'm not letting my mother drown." _

_"We're alright, James," Emma's voice all of the sudden spoke up, though it sounded odd. The two teens looked up and couldn't help but stare. Before them the three mothers were in the water as mermaids.

_

_Emma, Cleo and Rikki stared at themselves as well, not believing this was real. "This can't be real," Cleo muttered, gawking at her hands, as though they held the answer to her sudden transformation.

_

_"This is so cool," Rikki smiled, though even she was visibly shocked. _

"How is this possible?" Emma whispered, her hand running along her tail.

_"Neptuneâ€¦," Rachel breathed, making everyone look at her. _

_"You mean that astronomical occurrence?" James questioned, looking at her as he recalled Sierra's story. _

_Rachel nodded as she slowly explained, "Neptune is the Roman god of the ocean. What if the alignment between the moon and Neptune along with my moon stones somehow made it possible for them to transform. It's the only explanation I can think of." James stared at her in disbelief. _

_"It makes about as much sense as everything else that has to do with mermaids," Cleo agreed. _

_"It doesn't matter. We have to save our daughters," Rikki reminded them. _

They were about to submerge when Bella suddenly appeared and said, "Wait. Please give this to Taylor." She leaned over and placed a ring in Emma's hand. Mustering the toy ring, she nodded. "Thank you," Bella whispered and with a nod the trio submerged in synchronicity as though the time of not being mermaids had never existed.

The three mermaids stared at their mothers. "That's all?" Amber questioned, "A planet alignment with the moon. Kind of anticlimactic, but definitely mermaidish."

"What did you expect?" Emily replied, "Some kind of time machine or something else?" Amber shrugged.

"Anyway, lets head back and tell Rachel and James that we're alright. They must be worried sick," Sarah suggested. The others nodded and headed towards the moon pool, all but one.

"Aren't you coming?" Emily asked, looking up at the blond, who was still on the ground.

Taylor slowly raised her head. "I need a moment to be alone," she answered, "Go on without me."

Emily cocked an eyebrow. "You sure you're alright?" she inquired, worried.

"Yeah, I'll be fine," Taylor whispered, "Just need some time to myself." Emily didn't want to leave her friend, but at the same time she knew that there was little she could do to help her. With a final look over her shoulder, Emily dove into the water after her friends and family.

Once more Taylor was alone and this time she was fine with it. She had betrayed Marissa once again and nearly killed Amber, Sarah and Emily. She didn't deserve either friendship. Taylor was ashamed. Ashamed for what she had done. In her fury she didn't bother listening to her mother and ran away. To make it worse she then joined Marissa and nearly speared her friends. The friends that had stuck with her through everything and she had turned her back on them. What was she going to do now? She clenched her fists, but flinched when a flash of pain came from her right hand.

Slowly she opened her hand. In it was still the ring Emma had given her. She had been gripping it so tightly that there was a perfect imprint in her palm, the point of the heart actually drawing a bit of blood. Taylor stared at the ring, but slowly her vision blurred. Tears ran down her cheeks. Although she had never personally seen the ring, it was anchored into her mind.

A voice came up from the depths of her mind. It was her father's. The only memory she had of him. "Your mother and I had a fight and I wanted to apologize. I didn't have the means to buy a real ring, so instead I used up all my coins to at a machine in front of a supermarket until I got out a ring. A plastic ring that looked like it was made of gold with a small pink heart shaped bead. Although it was nothing special, she accepted my apology and wore it around her neck as a necklace, since it was too small for her fingers," the voice told her. This ring was the first and only ring her father had ever given her mother. Bella's keeping it and even bringing it along to Australia showed how much she loved not only her father, but Taylor. Gripping the ring again, Taylor got up. There was only one thing she could do, even if there was little chance they would forgive her. Slowly Taylor stepped to the edge of the moon pool and jumped in.

A while later Taylor walked up the steps to the café. Surprised Sierra looked up from her sandwich, which she was eating at a table. Apparently it was her break and she was enjoying the view that usually only her customers got to have pleasure in, since she had little time to do so when she was working. "Taylor?" she said, taken aback, "I thought James and Rachel said you weren't feeling well. Are you alright?"

It took Taylor a moment to realize that her friend and boyfriend had lied to Sierra to protect not only her job, but Sierra's high opinion of her. It touched Taylor so much that they thought of her, even

after all that she had done. "I'm feeling much better," Taylor assured her, but then stopped for a moment to think about her next words, "I'm sorry, Sierra."

"For what? For not calling? It's okay. You weren't feeling well and Rachel and James informed me of it. It's not your fault that you got sick. I'm just glad you're alright now," Sierra smiled. Those words were a shot through the heart. How did Taylor deserve such a good friend? There was so much more she wanted to apologize for, but knew just as well that she never could. She could never apologize for her prank and the trouble for Sierra that came along with it.

"But next time call. I had quite a bit of trouble, especially when all the drinks suddenly turned to jelly. It was really strange," Sierra told her and Taylor felt even more guilt arise inside her.

"I have to get going, Sierra," Taylor finally said.

"Okay," Sierra smiled, "I should get back to work myself. See you for work." As Sierra headed back for the counter, Taylor stepped down the steps, almost wishing she could tell Sierra the truth about herself. About mermaids and so much more. Slowly she headed for her next apology.

* * *

><p>Meanwhile the mothers and daughters swam back home. The mothers swam corkscrews and did turns around corals, enjoying their regained freedom in the water. Sarah, Emily and Amber smiled at each other, seeing the youthfulness revived in their mothers. They let themselves get carried away by their mothers' joy as swam through the water. Together they crisscrossed through the water.<p>

Suddenly a lot of bubbles formed around Emma, Cleo and Rikki's tails, causing everyone to look up. An instant later their tails were replaced by their legs and instantly they had to clamp their hands over their mouths to keep from breathing in water. Horrified their daughters each quickly grabbed their mothers and pulled them to the surface.

Coughing and sputtering they broke through the water just in time. "Are you alright?" Sarah asked, looking at her mother.

"Yeah," Cleo breathed, trying to calm her breath, "Just slightly wet."

"What happened?" Rikki questioned, looking disappointed down at her legs.

"If our powers are because of the alignment between the moon and Neptune," Emma began and Emily continued, "Then the alignment is over. You lost your powers, because Neptune and the moon are not connected anymore."

"Darn it," Amber muttered, "It was just getting really fun."

"Lets get us out of here before we catch a cold," Emma said as each mermaid towed their mother to shore. Luckily they weren't far from their home and arrived in a matter of minutes.

As the mothers climbed out of the water and their daughters dried off, Rachel, James and Bella hurried immediately over to them and bombarded them with questions. "Are you alright?" James asked.

"What happened?" Rachel inquired.

"Where is Taylor?" Bella questioned. After catching their breath, they told them what had happened.

After they finished James solemnly got up and just walked off. Emma watched after her son worried, but knew she could do nothing for him. "So Taylor will come soon?" Bella asked, hopefully. The others nodded. With a sigh she got up. "I need to be for myself for a moment," she excused herself and walked off inside.

The remaining people just stood there for a moment, unsure of what to do themselves. Finally the mothers turned to Rachel.

"Thank you," they said as they each held out their moon stone.

"It was nothing," Rachel replied, waving them off.

"That's not true," Cleo objected, "We know just as well as you that being able to swim again is something that not only we wanted."

"And we took that chance from you," Emma continued.

"The only chance in who knows how many decades or centuries. It was probably your only chance," Rikki ended, "For that we're sorry."

"Don't be," Rachel objected, although it did hurt that she knew she had given up her only chance to be a mermaid once more, even if only for a few hours. She tried to push those feelings and the tears away with logic. "It's better this way," Rachel told them, "I would not have been able to do what you have done. I couldn't have stood up to Marissa alone."

"Thank you," the mothers said once more as they handed Rachel her stones back. She accepted them with a smile. Slowly she threaded them back on the string to create her necklace once more. The stones felt odd. Almost as if now they didn't just possess Emily's, Sarah's and Amber's essence, but all of the mothers' as well. Without looking, Rachel was able to tell which stone had been whose.

"Let's dry off," Cleo suggested and they nodded, following her to her house. As they rounded the corner, they ran into Taylor, who looked shocked to see her. The mother stopped abruptly.

Taylor looked at them, opened her mouth, but then closed it again. Finally she said, "I'm sorry about what happened and thank you for saving me from making the worst mistake in my life."

The mothers gazed at the fidgeting girl in front of them. At last Cleo hugged her, startling Taylor. "You're welcome. I'm happy you see it that way," she whispered.

"I think you have to talk with the others though," Emma objected and nodded towards her daughter and the others. Taylor, who was released from the embrace, nodded slowly and stepped forward.

Sarah, Amber, Rachel and Emily looked up to see Taylor come around the corner, slowly. "Taylor," they said, softly.

She hung her head low. "I'm sorry for what I did. I will understand, if you want nothing to do with me anymore," Taylor told them, "Just know I considered you to be my friends and I owe you all so much for coming to rescue me. Thank you."

What happened next Taylor would have never expected. Emily, Amber and Sarah hurried over to her and hugged her. "It's not your fault," Sarah replied, "You were confused and hurt."

"Besides you tried to speak up for us with Marissa," Emily pointed out.

"This is all Marissa's fault," Amber agreed.

"Did you ever find out why she's so mad at humans?" Emily inquired.

Taylor shook her head. _Taylor stared at the moon pool. She used her magic to jellyfy a small wave, which lapped against the stones. Taylor continued her magic until finally the wave exploded, causing jelly to fly everywhere. It hadn't helped. Hatred still flared up inside her and she couldn't get it to calm down. "I hate you," Taylor whispered to no one._

"_Who do you hate?" a voice asked. Startled Taylor turned to see Marissa. She didn't care that Marissa was different, all she saw at that moment was her first and best friend. _

_After she had told Marissa everything, Marissa hugged her. "That's why humans are no good," she said, "Even the people you thought you could trust turn their backs on you." _

_Taylor looked up at her friend. In her eyes shone the hatred. "Why do you hate humans so much?" Taylor asked. _

"Maybe later," Marissa dodged, "Want to help me?" She reached a hand out. Taylor stared at it only for a second before taking it. This was her friend, no matter what.

"She didn't want to tell me, no matter how much I asked," Taylor replied.

"I wonder what her reason is," Emily muttered.

Meanwhile Taylor looked over to Rachel, who still stood further away and hadn't spoken a word to Taylor. "Can I talk to you?" Taylor asked. Rachel nodded solemnly and the two walked to the end of the dock. "I'm sorry. Sorry for calling you a liar. I was upset and just looking for a reason to argue. I don't believe you would do something like go after James," Taylor began.

"I'm glad you know at least that," Rachel replied coolly.

"But I'm even more sorry that you gave up a rare chance to be a mermaid," Taylor continued. Rachel stared up at her astonished. All the reasons of logic evaporated from her mind and tears rolled down

her cheeks. Taylor hugged her friend, feeling slightly helpless.

Finally Taylor held Rachel at arms length and wiped her tears away. "I know I shouldn't promise something like this, but I will find a way to ease your pain of no longer being a mermaid," she promised.

"Yeah, you shouldn't," Rachel agreed with a small smile, "Though if you stay with me, I won't feel alone." Taylor stared at Rachel and then nodded. "Right now I think there is someone, who wants to see you even more," Rachel told her and motioned towards the house, "She's waiting for you." Taylor swallowed hard and walked off, passed Amber, Sarah and Emily who smiled encouragingly.

Silently Taylor stepped into the house, seeing her mother with her back to her on the couch. "You kept it all these years," was all she could say.

Startled Bella turned around to face her daughter. Taylor thought her mother seemed to have aged several years in the day all this had happened. "Taylor," she whispered as Taylor slowly stepped towards her and took a seat on a chair opposite of her mother.

"Why?" Taylor asked as she pulled the ring from her pocket.

"I cherished that ring. I always take it with me wherever I go. A reminder of not only your father, but you," Bella explained as Taylor handed it back to her.

"I remember what father said about the ring, though he was being pretty vague," Taylor replied, "What exactly happened?"

"We fought in high school over something really petty. I honestly don't even remember what it was. It was our first really big fight and I honestly didn't believe we would have gotten back together, even though we both still loved each other. We were both stubborn like that. Rory was the bigger man and finally apologized with that ring. I would have accepted the apology even without it, but it showed me once more how much I love him and how much he means to me," Bella told her, a small smile playing her lips as she gently caressed the ring.

"And none of those feelings mattered when you left?" Taylor asked, this time though not with scorn or rage, but only mild hurtfulness.

"They did, but at that point we had drifted apart and I had felt like I wasn't doing you just. I took that ring with me as a promise. The promise that I would come back to you," Bella answered as she leaned forward and took Taylor's hand.

"And when you met Will?" Taylor inquired.

"My promise stayed the same. I would come back. Maybe not as your father's lover, but as his friend and your mother," Bella replied, "While I was gone, I realized I was pretty foolish to believe that just because we were high school sweethearts that we would be together forever."

Taylor just sat there for a moment. There was still one question on her mind and she knew she had to ask it. "What happened to my father?" she finally inquired, hesitantly.

"I honestly don't know. I tried looking for him ever since I came back. Even the foster home had no idea of where to find him," Bella confessed.

"Mom, I'm sorry about what I did yesterday," Taylor apologized.

"And I'm sorry for lying to you all these years and about how it all came to light," Bella replied and hugged her daughter, "Now I think it's time you talk to James." Taylor nodded and got up. "One last thing, Taylor," Bella called after her and Taylor turned around, "Take it." Her mother handed her the ring.

"Are you sure?" Taylor asked, astonished.

"I want you to have it. Just like it reminded me of my promise, it can remind you of your father," Bella answered as she closed Taylor's hand around the ring, "Remember you were born from love and you still are loved. Even if those people are no longer the same." Taylor nodded, gave her mother a quick peck on the cheek and then walked upstairs. The sun was slowly starting to set. It had been a really long day and it wasn't over yet.

After knocking she entered James' room. When Taylor saw his wrist bandaged her eyes widened. "Are you alright?" she asked as she hurried to James' side, who sat on his bed, "This is all my fault." Carefully she touched it.

"It's sprained," was all that James replied as he pulled his injured wrist away.

"I'm so sorry. For everything. For your injury and what I said about you and Rachel," Taylor apologized.

"You think that makes it better?" James suddenly snapped, startling Taylor.

"Iâ€¦," Taylor began, but James jumped up from the bed and demanded, "How many times have you sided with Marissa and how many times have you come back after she betrayed you? Why do you keep going back to someone as manipulative and deceiving as her?"

"Because she is my friend," Taylor whispered, softly.

"And Emily and the others aren't your friends?" James asked.

"They are," she protested, weakly.

"Really? You always point spears at your friends and threaten to kill them?" James yelled, making Taylor shrink back.

"No," Taylor muttered.

"What would you have done, if my mother and her friends hadn't shown up?!" James demanded to know. The words caught in her throat as she stared at him in his rage, "Or if Bella hadn't given my mother the ring?" Tears began to form at the corners of her eyes. Seeing her in

this stage, James calmed down slightly and took a deep breath. "I think what you said in the moon pool was pretty accurate," he finally said, "We're through."

Taylor stared at him for a moment and then ran from his room, tears streaming down her face. Why couldn't she get her life in order? Why was it that when she had survived one explosion she stepped on the next landmine. She vaguely heard Sarah, Amber, Rachel and Emily call her name as she ran past them outside. She kept running, turned the corner to the house and towards the street. Mako wasn't the place to go right now. Anywhere was fine, just not there.

Suddenly she ran into someone, but instead of falling over the person caught her. "Taylor?" a baffled voice said.

Recognizing the voice, Taylor looked up. Even through her blurred vision she was able to make out the person. "Will," she said astonished.

****A/N: ****Almost everyone has forgiven Taylor. Will James be able to? What could Will's sudden appearance in the Gold Coast bring? Please review.

20. Surprise

****A/N: ****I'm going on vacation into the mountains for ten days soon. Sadly there is no internet, so I won't be able to upload in that time. I'll try my best though to get it up as soon as possible once I return. Thanks for reading. Here is chapter 20 Enjoy!******

****Anonamous** Thank you for the correction. I knew Neptune was one or the other. I guess I picked the wrong one. I corrected it now.******

Italics mean a flashback.

Previously... Taylor has snapped out of her rampage and apologizes to everyone, even her mother. However James is unable to forgive her and breaks up with her. Taylor runs away, only to run into an unexpected visitor. Now on to the chapter.

Chapter 20: Surprise

Taylor ran out the door. Suddenly she bumped into someone, but instead of falling over the person caught her. "Taylor?" a baffled voice said.

Recognizing the voice, Taylor looked up. Even through her blurred vision she was able to make out the person. "Will," she said astonished. He held her out at arm's length and mustered her. Blinking her tears away, Taylor could finally see him properly. He looked at her worried.

"What's wrong, Taylor?" Will asked, eying the teary girl.

Quickly she wiped her tears away, replying, "It's nothing."

"You're crying about nothing?" Will repeated, looking into his step daughter's eyes. She tried to look away. Under his gaze she felt like

he could see right through her eyes into her soul and read in there what was the matter.

Before Taylor could reassure him, a voice questioned, "Will? What are you doing here?" The two turned to see a surprised Bella standing at the door. "I thought you had to work," she went on.

"It gets really lonely in a house when you're the only one living in it," Will replied as he spread out his arms, "Don't I get a kiss?" With a big smile, Bella stepped forward, wrapped her arms around her husband and kissed him longingly.

The commotion from the front brought not only Cleo, Rikki and Emma to look what was going on, but their daughters as well. Confused they took in the new arrival. Taylor quickly took the opportunity to draw attention from herself. "Will, these are my friends, Rachel, Sarah, Amber and Emily," she introduced them, "And this is my dad."

"And these are their mothers Emma, Rikki and Cleo," Bella added, introducing the mothers. Will smiled to each of them.

"So what brings you to the Gold Coast?" Cleo asked.

"I still had some vacation left and wanted to see what my tow girls were up to," Will answered.

"You could have called anyway," Bella told him. It was thought as a reprimand, but everyone could tell she was overjoyed to see him.

"But where would the fun in that be?" he retorted as he nuzzled her neck.

"I hope you don't have any more family, do you Taylor?" Rikki asked, jokingly, "Otherwise our houses will be overrun very quickly." Will looked at her confused.

"We're living with them," Bella quickly explained.

"I'm sure you're welcome to stay with Rikki," Emma said, to which Rikki simply nodded, "Why don't you go unpack?"

After Bella escorted Will to the guest room, he asked, "So why was Taylor so upset?" Bella thought for a moment and then told him the truth. Or the most downsized version of the truth possible. Namely that Taylor had been going out with James, but they had an argument and were currently on a break. Will clenched his fists. "I should really go talk to that boy. No one treats Taylor like this," he said and would have gone to the door, if Bella hadn't gently taken his arm.

Even though she found it sweet how much Will cared for Taylor, even though she wasn't his daughter, Bella couldn't risk Will finding out too much by accident. "I think you should let those two handle it," she replied, "They are nearly adults."

With a sigh Will let himself fall onto the bed. "I know," he whispered, "I just can't stand to see her so upset."

"I can't either, but being hurt is part of life," Bella said as she

put her arm around him.

They were silent for a moment before Will got up. "Where are you going?" she asked.

"Bathroom," Will replied and left the room. However instead of entering the room that Bella had indicated for him as bathroom, he took the stairs down and found the group of mothers in Rikki's kitchen. Surprised to see him, they looked up. "I have a favor to ask of you," he said.

* * *

><p>Meanwhile the five girls had retreated to Sarah's room, deciding it was not the best idea to go to Emily's house. Quietly they listened to Taylor tell them what had happened between her and James. Emily narrowed her eyes. "You want me to give him a stern talking to?" she asked.<p>

"No, don't," Taylor objected, softly, "Because the only thing that hurts more than the break up, is that he was right. I have no idea what I would have done, if your mothers hadn't shown up. Maybe I wouldn't have attacked you, maybe I would have. I don't know and that's even worse."

"Don't worry," Sarah said, "That's all in the past. I'm sure you'll get back together."

"Yeah. My brother would be stupid to reject the best thing that's ever happened to him," Emily agreed.

"So what shall we do the tomorrow?" Rachel inquired.

"I take it then you have nothing planned," Lewis said as he entered the room. The five girls shook their heads. "Great. Sarah, I thought we could do something together tomorrow," he went on.

"Ah, sure," Sarah replied, slightly unprepared, "What did you have in mind?" Lewis shrugged and with that left the room.

"That was strange," Amber muttered. Before they could start talking again, Ash came in.

"Emily, why don't we cook something tomorrow, if you're free," he suggested, catching another girl off guard again. Emily simply nodded, seeing she enjoyed the time she and her dad cooked together. Ash smiled and left again.

"This is just too strange. What's gotten into them all of the sudden? Next thing you know my dadâ€¦" Amber asked and before she could finish her sentence, Zane stood in the door, "Wait, let me guess. You also want to do some kind of lame father daughter activity tomorrow?" Now it was Zane's turn to be surprised, but he still managed to nod. "Fine," Amber gave in, "But only cause it seems like tomorrow is the international father daughter day." With a smile Zane left.

"Way too weird," Amber muttered, staring at the now closed door.

"What was that all about?" Taylor asked, looking to her friends for

an answer.

"Maybe they want to spend more time with you, realizing that we never know when life might end," Rachel suggested, referring to the encounter with Marissa.

"But shouldn't our mothers be included in that?" Sarah pointed out.

"Maybe they also have something to do," Emily suggested.

"I guess that leaves us for tomorrow," Rachel said, looking at Taylor, "Lets have a fun day." Taylor nodded, solemnly.

"We should head to bed," Emily told them, "It seems like it'll be a long day." The others agreed and they each headed for their own bed. Emily escorted Taylor to her room and bid her goodnight. She didn't want her to accidentally run into James alone. Emily knew Taylor wouldn't be able to handle that. Once Taylor had disappeared in her room, Emily headed for her own, stopping as she passed her brother's door. A small crack of light shone from under the door. He was still awake. Her eyes narrowed and her fist clenched as rage started to rise inside her. It seemed like an eternity as she stood in front of his door.

The next day Taylor sat at breakfast alone. Emily had already left early and James apparently hadn't left his room yet. Rachel would be here soon, but until then she would have to make do on her own. As she was eating her cereal, Bella came in through the door. Taylor frowned. "You're not going to spend the day together with Will?" she asked.

"No," Bella shook her head, sadly, "Will has something to take care of, but he said that we should meet up at the beach later at 4:30." Taylor nodded.

"So how much does Will know about all this?" Taylor asked after she had lowered her spoon.

"You mean about you, me and the mermaids?" Bella answered, "He knows you are my biological daughter, seeing I could hardly keep my frantic search for you low key. He however knows nothing about my mermaid past or your mermaid present."

"I think we should tell him," Taylor told her bluntly, "I've had enough of the secrets. At least inside our family we should know the truth about one another."

"I agree," Bella concurred, "Back when I met him I saw no reason to tell him, seeing I hadn't been a mermaid anymore and later I decided that once you knew the truth we would decide together what to do."

"We'll tell him," Taylor confirmed, "This afternoon." Bella nodded.

Suddenly Emma, Cleo and Rikki showed up. "There you are," Cleo said, "We were looking everywhere for you."

"For me?" Bella repeated confused.

"Yes, we thought we would go to the spa today," Emma explained.

"The spa? I have to meet Will this afternoon," Bella objected, feeling overrun.

"Don't worry. You'll be there with time to spare," Rikki assured her as she pulled Bella up, "Now come on. Taylor, we'll be taking your mother now. See you later." With that Bella was pulled from the room, leaving Taylor to stare after them.

"Apparently not only fathers can be like that," she muttered.

"Can be like what?" Rachel asked as she stepped inside, "Good morning." Quickly Taylor retold what had just happened. "Well, lets forget about that and have some fun," Rachel smiled and the two made their way to the beach.

For a while they simply chatted, but then Taylor had to ask, "So how is the relationship between you and your father?"

Rachel stopped for a moment to think and then answered, "For the fact that my parents are divorced and I'm living with my mom, pretty good. Whenever I visit we do something fun and he treats me like a princess. I have so much fun with him. Why?"

"It's justâ€¦ Seeing the way the others act around their dads made me wonderâ€¦ what happened to my dad," Taylor stammered, "Doesn't he miss me at all?"

"I'm sure he misses you a lot," Rachel quickly objected, trying to think of something to get her mind off her father and James, "Why don't we go drink a smoothie at Sierra's cafÃ©?" Taylor nodded with a smile and the two walked off. They spent the rest of the day at the cafe, talking about this and that and to Sierra, if she had the time. It was an enjoyable day and Taylor eventually forgot about her problem.

* * *

><p>Meanwhile Sarah and Lewis had arrived at their destination for the day. A roller-skating ring. Sarah looked at her step dad. "This is interesting," she said, not sure what to make of it.<p>

"Well, any water activities obviously are cut from the list and I thought you're never too old to have some fun," Lewis explained.

"You sure you're up for this?" Sarah asked and Lewis nodded, "Well then what are we waiting for?"

After they had gotten their skates on, the two got onto the ring, which several others were already using. It was fairly dark and bright disco light illuminated the area. Music played in the background. Lewis took a few steps onto the ring, while Sarah grasped the railing that ran along the side of the ring, her knuckles turning white. Lewis chuckled. "Can't you skate?" he asked.

"I'm not that good," Sarah answered, "There is a reason I am more often in the water."

"Come on," Lewis said and reached a hand out to her. "It's not that hard."

Sarah took the hand, but the second she let go of the railing, her skates slid out from under her and she fell to the ground. Now Lewis couldn't help, but laugh. "Very funny," Sarah muttered as Lewis helped her up. As soon as the two were upright, their legs began to shake and in full synchronicity they fell to the floor. "See," Sarah said, "You're no better." The two looked at each other and began to laugh.

After they skated for a while, they sat down in a caf  . "That was a lot of fun," Sarah smiled.

"I'm glad you enjoyed it," Lewis replied.

"But why the sudden urge to do something with me?" Sarah inquired.

"No particular reason," Lewis answered, nonchalant.

Sarah frowned. "It had nothing to do with Marissa capturing us?" she prodded.

"No," Lewis retorted firmly and glanced at his watch, "Well, I guess we can slowly start heading there."

"Where?" Sarah asked, intrigued.

"You'll see," Lewis smiled as he paid and then got up to leave.

* * *

><p>Meanwhile Emily and Ash were getting out their ingredients to cook with. They had abandoned their usual nice kitchen for the kitchen of a friend, who happened to be a chef, thus making his kitchen modern and extremely extravagant. They were allowed to cook here sometimes. Emily frowned at the recipes. "What's the matter? Don't want to cook with me anymore?" Ash asked, seeing his daughter's expression.<p>

"It's not thatâ€|," Emily began hesitantly, not wanting to upset him, "It's just these recipesâ€|"

"What about them?" he inquired.

"I can understand that we are only cooking for two, although we usually cook for mom and James too, but some of the stuff in there we don't like," Emily pointed out.

"It's for a special occasion," Ash explained. Frantically Emily searched her head for something, anything she could have missed that required such an elaborate meal.

"Don't worry, you didn't forget anything," Ash assured her.

"Then who is it for?" Emily asked.

"It's a surprise," Ash smiled, "You'll find out later." Emily frowned

as her eyes fell on the flour.

Quickly she grabbed a pinch of it and threw it at her dad. It hit him square in the face, coating it white. Freeing his eyes, he looked at her. Emily gave a cheeky smile. "You're going to pay for that," he smiled and threw flour at her.

After a short food fight, Emily spoke up, "Truce. If we continue on, there won't be any ingredients left."

Ash nodded as he looked around. "And we'd better clean this place up well or someone's going to throw a fit," he added, looking at the flour, sugar and other ingredients that covered the counters, floor and occasionally the cabinets.

"Maybe we should also clean up ourselves," Emily suggested as she felt her hair, which was a single white mass.

"Good idea," Ash agreed and they began cooking.

* * *

><p>"This is a joke right?" Amber asked as she stared at the place in front of her, "Emily is cooking, Sarah is roller skating and we're doing this?" She was standing in the middle of the starting point on the first hole of a golf course. Her father had just teed off, just like she had before him.<p>

"I agree it's not my favorite sport, but you used to be so good at it and had so much fun when you were younger," Zane objected as they walked towards their balls.

"I was 6, dad," Amber retorted, annoyed, "What ever happened to the guy mom told me about? The guy that used to ride motorcycles and stuff like that?"

"He grew up and became a higher up in a big company. All higher up people play golf," Zane told her.

"And why does that mean I have to play it?" Amber inquired. Zane ignored her and continued to play.

When they finally reached the green, Amber couldn't take it anymore. "How about we make it interesting?" she suggested.

"How so?" Zane inquired, intrigued.

"If I get the ball in the hole with my next hit, we ditch this and go shopping and another day you'll ride motorcycles with me," Amber proposed.

"And if I win?" Zane asked.

"Then we continue to play this game to the end and next time I'll come without a complaint," Amber replied.

Zane looked at his daughter's ball. It was still a long way away from the hole and a very tricky shot. Plus Amber hadn't been playing too well. "Okay," Zane agreed, looking up, "It's a bet." Amber smiled. She knew her dad could never resist a bet. She looked at her ball,

its line and put herself in position. With a confident whack she send the ball on its journey across the green as it veered left and right, slowed as it came near the hole. It looked like it would be just short, but with the last turn the ball fell into the hole.

With a triumphant smile Amber cheered, "I won! It's shopping time!"

"You tricked me," Zane accused her, "You were playing bad on purpose."

"Maybe," Amber grinned, "But a bet's a bet. You promised."

With a sigh Zane gave in. "Fine, we'll leave, but we got to be there by then."

"Where by when?" Amber asked, confused.

"You'll find out," Zane smiled, happy he had at least this one ace up his sleeve. It would probably be an expensive lose for him, but at least he had an excuse to go ride a motorcycle again. It had been a long time and he was itching to see, if he could still ride one. How he sometimes hated to act like a proper person.

* * *

><p>James had gotten up later than usual this day. This had two reasons. For one he had no classes that day. Secondly he didn't want to run across Taylor. He had by chance overheard his mother and Emily talking and knew that he would have the house to himself today. Luckily after yesterday's encounter with his sister, he was happy that she wouldn't be around. She had barged into his room late that evening.<p>

_Surprised James looked up as Emily stormed into his room. He had been in the middle of writing an essay for college. Well, technically he hadn't been writing anything for the last hour, but staring at the screen, Taylor's tear soaked face always in front of his inner eye. "How could you do this to Taylor?" Emily demanded, standing in the middle of his room, her arms crossed. _

_James scowled. He wasn't in the mood for this. "Did she send you?" he questioned. _

Emily's face only darkened. "If you think that, then you really should stay broken up," Emily answered.

_James sighed as he rubbed his forehead. "No, I know she would never ask you to do something like this," he admitted, eliciting a small smile from Emily. _

_"Why did you break up with her?" she asked, sitting down on his bed. _

"She nearly killed you, mom and everyone else," James retorted, "Plus she keeps going back to her psycho friend, even though she always betrays her."

_ "I know Marissa isn't normal, but she is Taylor's friend," Emily objected. _

_"A friend would not kill your other friends," James pointed out, "Not to mention all the secrecy." _

_"It's not easy being a mermaid, James," Emily snapped. _

_"If being a mermaid means killing people, having a list of secrets all the way to the moon and not being able to make decisions, then I don't want to be one, let alone know one," James yelled. _

Emily's eyes turned to ice and slowly she got up. "You're not worth the tears Taylor is shedding," she hissed and left. James stared at the now closed door. He regretted those words as soon as he had spoken them, but now it was too late. With unneeded force he slammed his laptop shut and laid down on his bed. There was no way he was going to be able to write another word. Now not only Taylor was haunting him, but Emily too.

The ringing of the doorbell made James snap back to reality. He frowned. Who could it possibly be this early in the morning? Mail man maybe? With a sigh James got up and headed for the door. Opening it, he was surprised. Standing there was Ryan, Jordan and Daniel. James looked at them confused before saying, "Emily isn't here today and don't you two have the wrong house." He knew he sounded rude, but the lack of sleep and his general bad mood at the moment weren't helping.

"Actually we're all exactly where we want to be," Daniel replied, making James frown.

"We're here to talk to you," Ryan explained.

"To me," James repeated, "About what?"

"What do you think," Jordan retorted and simply walked in, followed by the other two. James stared after them. So much for his quiet day. Signing he followed the guys.

"So what's all this about?" James asked when they had all finally settled in the living room.

"We heard you broke up with Taylor," Ryan replied and James nodded, solemnly.

"Why?" Daniel asked.

"If you heard that I broke up with her, then you also heard why," James retorted, but then elaborated anyway, "Because she nearly killed my family and because she can't seem to pick a side."

"That's it?" Jordan inquired, "That's all?"

"What do you mean that's all?!" James snapped, "She nearly killed my mother and sister. I would like to see how you would react then."

"Let's rephrase that," Ryan jumped in, "We wouldn't be here, if we didn't believe that you and Taylor could be together."

"We just don't believe that something like that could drive you apart

after all you two kept it a secret from everyone and how she rescued you," Daniel went on.

James clenched his fists. "I hate all the secrets," he muttered, "If Taylor was a normal girl, we wouldn't have this problem now."

"So that's the problem. You can't cope with her mermaid side," Ryan concluded, "That's what we thought and why we're here."

"How can you help me?" James questioned, amused that they seemed to think that they could tell him something about dating. They were all quite a bit younger, although Daniel was a hint closer to him in age.

"Unlike you we've been together with mermaids for a year now," Daniel reminded him, "We have been there, done that."

"We all know the hardships that comes with being the boyfriend of a mermaid," Jordan spoke up, "Heck, Amber and I break up every now and then because we can't take it. We don't find time for one another or she's keeping a secret again." Jordan's aura was getting darker as he started listing all the shortcomings of such a relationship.

Quickly Ryan jumped in, "Anyway fact is that relationships between mermaids are different. They aren't just friendships. They depend on each other on survival and they are the only ones that understand each other," Ryan explained, "For Taylor losing Marissa isn't just losing a friend. She's losing her only childhood friend, who at one point saved her from misery and kept their secret together for so many years alone. She's losing one of five people who really understands her. For Taylor it isn't an option to lose her."

"I may understand that, but how can she side with an option that means hurting her other four friends?" James inquired, "You don't understand that."

"You're wrong there," Jordan replied, making James look up, "Last year Amber injured Sarah when she was under the control of Jessica Denman. It's quite the same, only that Marissa is manipulating Taylor's feelings for her so that she does what she wants." James stared at Jordan. He hadn't heard of this story before. Probably because everyone wanted to forget it as quickly as possible.

"We worry more about our girlfriends than everyone else. Just last year they went off on their own, ready to die to save their moon pool," Daniel reminded him, "It might not be easy every now and thenâ€¦ Actually most of the time, but the time you do have is nothing short of amazing. They are the best girlfriends you can have. Loyal."

"Make you see the world in a different way," Ryan added.

"And there is never a dull moment," Jordan smirked.

James looked at the guys sitting in front of him. "So you're saying I should forgive her?" James inquired.

"We're saying you should reconsider it from a different angle," Ryan answered.

"If you don't want anything to do with mermaids anymore, that includes all the secrets and usually knowing last what's going on, now is your chance to get away from that world," Jordan told him, but then remembered whose brother he was, "Or at least as much as you can."

"Though you should remember we're all humans," Daniel continued, "Some just more than others."

James solemnly thought about what the guys had just told him. He was about to speak up when the door opened and Will walked in. Surprised he stopped short, seeing the group of guys in the living room. "Sorry, I didn't realize that someone was still here. I hope I'm not interrupting anything," Will said.

"No, not at all," Daniel replied, "Actually we were just leaving." The three guys got up.

"If you don't have anything to do right now, would you mind helping me with something?" Will asked, making the guys look up curious.

* * *

><p>A few hours later the girls were brought back together at the beach. Before them stood a small table prepared for two with candles on it. "So this is what the food is for," Emily concluded.<p>

"But what is this?" Amber asked. Rachel and Taylor, who had found their way here on their own shrugged.

"It kind of looks like a date," Sarah said.

"You could say that," Will replied, showing up in front of them, dressed in a rather formal looking outfit, although it wasn't a suite, "Thanks for the food, Ash." He took the food and placed the plates on the table.

"So what is all this about?" Taylor inquired.

"Actually," Will began, but cut himself off when he saw someone come towards him.

It was Bella in a beautiful blue dress. Behind her the other mothers walked. "What is all this?" Bella asked, astonished.

"You really don't remember what happened here exactly 17 years ago?" Will retorted.

Bella thought for a split second and then her face lit up. "It's the anniversary of the first time that we met," she smiled and hugged Will, "I'm so sorry, Will. I completely forgot with all that was going on here."

Will looked at her confused. "What are you talking about?" he asked.

Seeing that it was impossible for Will to just drop the subject, Taylor stepped forward. "Can we talk to you for a moment?" she inquired. She didn't want to ruin the joyous occasion, but Bella had slipped up and she knew if she didn't do it now, she might never

gather the courage to say it again. Will nodded and the trio walked off a bit further from the rest. The others knew what was going to happen and braced themselves for a possible disaster.

"What did you want to tell me?" Will asked.

Taylor tried to find the right words to say it, but then she just said, "I'm a mermaid." Will stared at her. "That's why I sometimes act strange and I never go near water," she went on.

"She got this from me," Bella confessed, "I was also a mermaid." Will could do nothing but gawk at his two women as they told him everything.

When they finally finished he just stood there, unable to speak. "Will, sweetie, say something," Bella said, softly.

Instead of saying anything, he kissed her. "Now I finally understand why you fascinated me so much. You are the ocean for me that was always there, even when we were on land," he whispered and kissed her once more.

"So you aren't upset that we kept it all from you?" Bella asked.

"No, I understand," Will replied, "Though I have a few more questions."

"You can ask them over dinner," Taylor said, "It's getting cold. Have fun."

"Bye, my little mermaid," Will smiled and gave her a quick kiss on the cheek.

As Taylor stepped back, Bella asked, "So you came to Australia for our anniversary? You're the best." She kissed him. Then she turned to the others. "And all of you were in on it?" she asked.

The parents nodded while Taylor replied, "We had no idea."

"But it sure does explain a lot," Amber muttered, referring to their dads' strange behavior.

"We were kept busy so we wouldn't interfere with the preparations or accidentally spill to Taylor, who might tell Bella," Emily said and Will nodded.

"That's right," a voice said behind them. The girls turned to see James, Jordan, Daniel and Ryan walking up to them.

"You're here too," Sarah smiled as the girls gave their boyfriends a kiss.

Taylor stepped away from James and tried to avoid eye contact. Then a question came to mind. "How did you meet? You never told me," she asked, looking at her parents.

Bella took Will's hand and told them, "Well, like you all know I went on vacation. Actually I went here. We ran into each other in the water over there. Will had just come back from a dive while I was

playing around in the water."

"I was so fascinated by her swimming style and her beauty that I just had to speak to her," Will admitted with a slight blush. Everyone in the group knew exactly which style he meant. Bella had swum like a mermaid.

"Well, I guess we should leave you two alone. Have a great evening," Emma said.

"Thank you for everything," Will thanked them.

With that everyone saw it as their cue to go. Taylor was about to follow her friends when James grabbed her arm and pulled her aside. "What do you want?" she asked, icily.

"I want to apologize," James replied, "I should never have said all that. I'm still new at being a mermaid's boyfriend and I still have a lot to learn."

"What brought this development?" Taylor questioned.

"Actually," James said and motioned towards her friends and their boyfriends, "Them."

Surprised Taylor looked up. Daniel, Ryan and Jordan looked over their shoulders to them. "We really have amazing friends, don't we?" she whispered.

"Yes, we do," he smiled, "Does that mean you forgive me?"

"Only if you are willing to learn about being a mermaid boyfriend from them," Taylor replied, smiling. James leaned down and kissed her. "I take that as a yes," she grinned and quickly they followed the rest to give her parents some privacy.

"Emily," James spoke up, getting the attention of his sister, "I... About yesterday..."

Emily turned around and said, "It's okay. I forgive you. But only because of that." She motioned towards James' and Taylor's intertwined hands.

Taylor glanced around at the big group, her gaze specifically catching the father's forms. It was strange to see them all together and it was almost painful for her to watch. "What's wrong?" James asked, softly, as his attention was back on her now.

"Seeing all of you together as a family really makes me wonder," Taylor answered.

"Wonder what?" he inquired.

"Where my dad is," Taylor muttered and looked out to the horizon as a breeze toyed with her hair.

****A/N: ****A successful anniversary and a reconciliation between Taylor and James leaves everything in an almost fairy tale like state. However Taylor brought up a good point. Where is her father? Could unexpected help bring her closer to the truth? Please review.

21. Where are you?

****A/N:** I'm back from my vacation. It was awesome, but like I feared I wouldn't be able to upload in time. To compensate this one is fairly long. Also I'll be starting college tomorrow. I'm really nervous. I hope to still keep updating regularly. Anyway thanks for reading and reviewing. Here is chapter 21. Enjoy!**

****Anonamous** First of you are an awesome reviewer and look at every detail. You almost know this story better than me. However Jessica's last name was Denman, she just switched the parts of her name to Manden so the girls wouldn't connect her with her mother. I guess I never really made it clear back then.**

Previously... Will suddenly appears in Australia and Emily, Amber and Sarah are taken out for a day with their dads. While Taylor grieves her break up with James, she decides to tell Will the truth about her and Bella. Meanwhile James has a talk with the other boyfriends and he gets back together with Taylor. Will throws a surprise anniversary date for Bella and they tell him about mermaids. Taylor wonders about her real dad. Now on to the chapter.

Chapter 21: Where are you?

"Are you serious?" Amber asked, eying her.

"What about school?" Emily inquired.

"Are you sure about this?" Sarah questioned. Rachel simply looked at her. The five girls sat together in Emily's room when Taylor finally spoke out about the thing that's been weighing on her mind since yesterday when her mother and Will had had their anniversary.

Taylor had expected a reaction like this when she told them of her plan, but honestly she had expected an a lot more negative reaction than this. "I have to do this," Taylor told them, firmly.

"We know this must mean something to you, but isn't it nearly impossible?" Rachel pointed out. Taylor clenched her fist. They didn't understand. Then again how could she expect them to understand?

"We're just saying that your mother looked for not only you, but your dad for so many years and she never found him," Sarah reminded her.

"That doesn't mean that he can't be found. He's out there somewhere and I'm going to find him," Taylor objected, staring her friends down, daring them with her gaze to try and stop her.

The four others saw the sparks in her eyes and knew they had no chance. "Okay. You win," Amber gave in.

"We'll do whatever we can to help find your dad," Emily offered.

Taylor looked at her friends for a moment and then replied, "I don't think there is anything you can do." Solemnly Taylor got up and

headed for the door.

"Taylor," Rachel began, but stopped when the door closed behind her.

"What is up with her?" Amber asked.

"It's a big deal for her. I think we might have underestimated how big of a deal it is," Emily answered.

"But why does she suddenly want to find her father?" Sarah questioned.

"Only Taylor can tell us that and she doesn't seem to be in the mood to share that," Rachel replied with a shrug, "I guess all we can do for now is wait for her to come to us for help and be there for her, whether she finds her dad or especially if she doesn't."

* * *

><p>Stalking down the hallway, Taylor clenched and unclenched her fists. She didn't want their help. At least not if it was out of pity. They didn't believe it was possible to find her dad and if they didn't believe it, then there was no way they would be of much help. As soon as they hit a rough patch they would give up. Although it annoyed her, Taylor could understand it. Even now there was doubt inside her of whether she would be able to find the mysterious figure that she called father.<p>

Subconsciously her body navigated her to the next phase. There was no way she could do this task, if this person didn't help. Taylor knocked at the door and entered. Bella and Will were in their room. Surprised the two looked up. "Taylor. What can we do for you?" Bella asked.

"Actually, I want to tell you something," Taylor began, slowly, "I want to find dad." The two adults looked at her shocked with their eyebrows raised. Quickly she added, "Please don't get me wrong, Will. You will always be my dad, butâ€¦ I want to find out where I'm really from."

Bella took Will's hand as he exhaled, slowly. "I understand, Taylor."

"I spent so many years looking for him, Taylor, and I couldn't find him," Bella reminded her.

"I know, but even if I don't find him, at least I have the feeling that I did everything that's within my power to try and find him," Taylor told her.

Bella looked at her daughter and then replied, "Okay, I'll help you anyway I can, but I won't promise anything."

Taylor's eyes lit up and she bound for them, throwing her arms around them. "Thank you," she breathed, "I can't ask for more."

With that Taylor got back up and walked outside. She needed a place to think and what better place than the beach. Placing herself strategically a little further away from the crowds, Taylor stared

out at the sea. Pretty quickly her confidence diminished as she realized the obvious. For 13 years no one has seen her father and nothing Bella had told her of their relationship from even further back was not going to help. Any lead to her father ended with her entering the foster home. Her head fell into her palms. What had she gotten herself into?

Maybe she should call the others? No. Taylor shook her head. Going back to them already after she had just rejected their offer was something her pride, as small as it might be, wouldn't allow. Her hands dug themselves into her hair in frustration. "What am I going to do? I'm never going to find him," Taylor muttered, ruffling her hair.

"So you want to find your dad?" a voice asked.

Startled Taylor turned around to see her old friend. "What do you want, Marissa?" Taylor demanded to know.

"I want to help you find him," the blond replied, calmly, ignoring Taylor's obvious tone.

"Why would you want to help me?" Taylor asked, surprised at her friend, "I'm siding with the enemy."

"You're right, you are, but it's not about that," Marissa answered, "I know how much this means to you. I was there so many years ago when you would always ask for your father. I know this isn't some spur of the moment thing, just because you saw how great a father is. This means a lot to you and I'm the only one who can relate to you on this." Taylor stared into her friend's ocean blue eyes and it was as though she was taken back in time. Back to the time where Marissa was her best friend, who would do anything for her. Who would hug and comfort her whenever she wondered about her parents.

"You mean it?" Taylor whispered, hoarsely.

"You know I don't kid with this topic," Marissa replied, firmly.

Taylor nodded. "But where do we start? I have no idea. The others were right when they said that it's nearly impossible," Taylor muttered.

"Nothing is impossible," Marissa reminded her friend, "Especially for mermaids."

"Then where do we start?" Taylor asked.

"At the beginning," Marissa answered, partially joking, "We know your dad isn't in Rockport, cause obviously your mother would have found him there."

"Great. That just leaves 99,999% of the world," Taylor muttered, sarcastically.

"Tell me everything you know about your dad," Marissa demanded.

With that Taylor recapitulated her knowledge on her father's life. "So he was a jobless alcoholic, who lost his daughter," Marissa

summed up and Taylor flinched at her usage of words, no matter how true they might be, "How do you think he would have reacted to your lose?"

"Badly, I guess," Taylor replied, "But what does that have to do with it?"

"Easy. Where do you think he would go to forget about it?" Marissa questioned.

A few seconds passed until Taylor exclaimed, "A pub!"

"Exactly and if he is just as stuck in the past as Bella claims he was, then he probably went to the same one as in high school days," Marissa explained, while Taylor was already pulling out her phone and dialing her mother's number.

"Mom, what pub did you and dad go to while you were in high school?" Taylor asked, not even bothering with a greeting.

"Pub?" Bella repeated, slightly ambushed, but then thought for a moment, "We went into Old Finn's Pub. Why do youâ€|"

"Thanks mom," Taylor interrupted and hung up. Everyone in Rockport knew Old Finn and Old Finn seemed to know everyone, even the little kids, saying that it was important to know the people that would one day be his customers. The elderly man was known for telling the wildest stories from the past and being old enough to remember the second world war, even though he claims he could also remember the first, though no one believes that. Also he had some of the best beer in Ireland, supposedly.

"Old Finn's Pub," Taylor told her friend, "Now what?"

"Simple. We call him," Marissa replied, holding up Taylor's phone.

"Are you crazy? Do you know what time it is there?" Taylor asked.

"9 hours later than it is here, if you must know, so early noon," Marissa replied, instantly, "Now call him." With a sigh Taylor surrendered. There was no way she was going to win against her friend on this. After quickly googling the number via her phone, Taylor dialed the number.

After ringing a few times, Old Finn picked up. "Hello. This is Old Finn. How may I help you?" he answered the phone.

"Hey Old Finn. It's Taylor, Bella's daughter," Taylor said.

"Ah, Taylor. How are you? I heard you went down under. That reminds me of a timeâ€|," the pub keeper asked and was about to go into one of his stories, when Taylor interrupted him, "Listen, I have a question. Do you know anything about Rory Walsh? He was mom's boyfriend in high school and she said that she would like to see him again."

"Rory Walsh," Old Finn repeated, thoughtfully, "I haven't heard that name in years. The last time I heard or saw anything from him was shortly after he lost custody of his daughterâ€| Sad story." Taylor

let out a small breath of relief. He didn't make the connection between the four year old her and the her now. That would be the perfect story to tell for him.

"Do you have any idea where he could have gone?" Taylor inquired, hopefully.

"No idea. He came in one night, drunk himself and suddenly had the idea that he wanted to chase after Bella," Old Finn answered.

"But he had no idea where she was," Taylor objected.

"That's what I said too, but he wouldn't listen. In the end I lent him some money and with that he left. I never saw him since. I always wondered what happened to him," Old Finn told her, "Come to think of it that was quite a bit of moneyâ€|"

"Thanks, Old Finn," Taylor cut him off, "Bye."

"So your dad borrowed some money and went looking for your mother," Marissa muttered, having listened in on the conversation.

"You think he's still looking for her? He could be anywhere," Taylor replied.

"No way. No one searches for someone over 10 years," Marissa objected, "I bet he found a new love of his life and is living happily somewhere." Solemnly Taylor nodded. She wished it wasn't so, but she couldn't see Rory still looking for Bella.

"Say Taylor," Marissa said thoughtfully, "What is up with that girl Rachel?"

Taylor's head jerked up. Was her friend trying to spy on her after all? "I don't think that's any of your business," Taylor replied, coolly. She half expected her friend to protest or demand to know something, but instead she said nothing. Confused Taylor looked up again at the sky again, only to realize that the sun was already setting. Surprised she got up. "I guess I should go home," she said, "What about you?"

"I'll be leaving as well," Marissa simply replied and Taylor knew she wouldn't find out more. As Taylor hurried off, Marissa called after her, "It might be a good idea, if you don't tell them anything of my involvement." Taylor turned back to her friend and nodded. She knew telling the others would bring unnecessary complication into the search.

As Taylor walked up to the house, Emily, Amber, Rachel and Sarah hurried up to you. "There you are!" Sarah exclaimed, "We were starting to worry."

"Why?" Taylor asked, confused.

"Well, obviously having a lone mermaid walk around out there is perfect prey for Marissa," Amber replied, sneering Marissa's name.

A cold sweat ran down Taylor's back. If only they knew. "Marissa won't attack me," Taylor insisted.

"How can you be so sure?" Emily questioned.

Before Taylor could think of an answer, Rachel spoke up, "So were you able to get any closer?"

Instantly everything went silent. Taylor looked up to see not only Bella and Will, but the rest of the mothers too. Even from the distance, she could see the hope in Bella's eyes. Wanting her daughter to find the man that she had loved. "Well, there is good news and bad news," Taylor began, carefully, "Good news Rory got money from Old Finn, which he wanted to use to find you. Bad news, that was over 10 years ago and he could be anywhere. Unless you told him where you were going."

Everyone's eyes turned to Bella. The disappointment was clear in Bella's face. "Of course, I didn't tell him," Bella replied, "Back then I wanted to get away from everything."

Rikki, Cleo and Emma escorted Bella inside along with Will. Meanwhile the daughters crowded around Taylor. "We're sorry, Taylor," Sarah said.

"Maybe it just wasn't meant to be," Rachel suggested.

"Hey, I have something that will get you on different thoughts," Amber told her.

Confused Taylor looked at her. "What do you mean?" she asked.

"Well, I have something open with my dad and I'm sure he'll be glad to incorporate you in it," Amber smiled, "We all discussed it while you were gone."

With that Amber skipped into the house, giddy at the prospect of what tomorrow might bring. Luck was with her and she found her father sitting in the living room. "So dad," Amber began, "Remember that bet you and I had? I was thinking we could go tomorrow."

"I know you want to, but there is no way your mother will agree to it," Zane objected.

"What won't I agree to?" Rikki asked, coming into the room.

Amber thought quickly and changed her tactics. "Dad lost a bet to me yesterday and he said he would take me to ride motorcycles," Amber told her.

Rikki's eyebrow raised at that and stared at her husband. "You what," she hissed.

"I didn't think she was going to hole the putt," Zane protested.

"That is no reason to bet something like that," Rikki objected, but then sighed, "Well, a bet is a bet so you're allowed to go. However, if anything happens to our daughter, I'm holding you responsible." Rikki left the room. She would never admit it, but she sometimes missed the rush of riding behind Zane on his motorcycle.

A big grin spread across Amber's face. "You heard her," she

said.

"Okay, I give in," Zane sighed, "We'll go tomorrow."

"Can we take the others along as well?" Amber asked.

Zane's head shot up. "No way. Not happening," he objected.

"Oh come on," Amber replied, her lips coming together in a pout, "It would be a nice way to distract Taylor."

Zane stared at his daughter and then sighed. "I really got to learn to say no to you," he muttered as Amber jumped up, gave him a kiss on the cheek and hurried off.

"Thanks, dad," she called to him as she hurried off to tell the others the big news.

"But only if their parents allow it!" he yelled after her.

* * *

><p>Taylor meanwhile was back in her room, curled up in a ball on her bed. No matter how much she hated the thought there was no way to find her dad. Suddenly there was a knock at the door. Quickly she got up and answered it. James stood before and, after a kiss, came in. "How are you feeling?" he asked.<p>

"A little depressed," Taylor admitted.

"You shouldn't feel bad," James told her as he put his arm around her.

"It's just that I really thought I could find him," Taylor replied.

"If your mom, who probably knows your dad better than anyone, couldn't find it, then you shouldn't be upset for not finding him," he tried to comfort her.

Taylor shrugged. "I'm tired," she said and James nodded. With one more reassuring hug he left her alone.

Taylor laid back down on her bed. Although she really was tired, she couldn't sleep. Suddenly an idea came into her head.

* * *

><p>The next morning the five girls met Zane outside of their house. Zane still wasn't thrilled about the idea, but had given up arguing with himself. "Okay, you follow my orders and take no risks, you understand that?" he told them and they all nodded.<p>

Just then Bella stepped out of the house. Quickly Taylor hurried to her mom, leaving a confused group behind. "Mom, I have one more question," Taylor said, "Why did you go to Australia back then?"

"Why you ask," Bella repeated thoughtfully, "Well, I always wanted to go here to swim as a mermaid. I guess it was the first place that

came to mind back then."

Taylor's eyes lit up and suddenly she hurried towards the beach. "Taylor, where are you going?" Rachel called after her.

"I'm not giving up yet!" Taylor yelled, "Go without me!"

The remaining people stared after her. "I guess we should get in the car," Amber said, the first to recover from the sudden departure.

* * *

><p>Taylor raced to the beach. She had an idea. There was little chance it actually happened like that, but there was a chance. She skidded to a stop just a few feet from the water. Staring out at the ocean, she expected her friend to rise from the water. Taylor didn't know how, but Marissa always seemed to know whenever she was near the water. In anticipation Taylor watched the waves before her intently, but nothing happened. Finally Taylor couldn't wait any longer, cupped her hands around her mouth and shouted, "Marissa!"<p>

"I'm right here. No need to shout," a voice said right behind her. Taylor flinched with surprise as she turned around to see her friend.

"You scared me," Taylor said, putting her hand over her fluttering heart.

"So what did you find out?" Marissa asked as the two set off down the beach side by side in no particular direction. Typical Marissa. She rarely apologized and if she did, have the time she didn't mean it.

"Well, I didn't find out, but I have a theory," Taylor admitted, "My mother was together with Rory for a really long time. Even though she never willingly mentioned going to Australia, what if he remembered her at one point mentioning that that was the place she wanted to go to one day?"

"It's possible, but Australia is still really big. He could still be anywhere," Marissa pointed out, thoughtfully.

"But maybe she even mentioned the Gold Coast," Taylor suggested.

"He never came across her though," Marissa objected. Taylor frowned. Why was her friend always so logical?

Just then Taylor realized that a lot of people were watching her. Wait, no. They weren't watching her, but Marissa. Abruptly they were forced to stop. A guy, tall, tanned dark and definitely handsome stepped into their path. He was a dream of a guy for nearly any girl. His eyes wandered over Marissa. "So how about I treat you girls to a free round of smoothies?" he asked.

To Taylor's surprise Marissa's eyes fluttered up, looking at the guy through her lashes. "Well... How about you get out of our way before I break your arm," she threatened with a sweet smile and only the darkness in her eyes told everyone that she wasn't joking, "Lets go, Taylor." Marissa grabbed her hand and pulled Taylor behind her.

Far enough away from the guy, she muttered, "Human scum."

Taylor looked to her friend and asked, "Why do you hate humans so much?"

"You don't tell me anything and I don't tell you anything," Marissa answered, solemnly. At that moment Taylor realized that there was something between them and it seemed nearly impossible to go back to the way they had once been friends.

The pair had reached the pier and continued on when a voice said, "Ah, Taylor, it's been a while." Taylor went rigid. She knew that voice all too well.

Slowly the duo turned to face Dr. Alder. "Relax. You're in a crowded place. He can't do anything," Taylor reassured herself silently and smiled at her enemy. "Indeed it has. How have you been, Dr. Alder?" Taylor asked.

"Good as can be," Dr. Alder answered and then looked to Marissa, "And who might this be?"

"I'm Taylor's friend from Ireland. My name is Marissa," Marissa introduced herself, though she did not bother to hide her disdain for the scientist as she reached her hand out to him. Shaking his hand, Marissa applied a little more pressure than one would call appropriate. If Dr. Alder noticed the animosity or even recognized Marissa, he didn't show it. Taylor felt like they were at the edge of a volcano. One wrong step and it was a fiery death or a long drop to the hard ground.

Finally the deadlock seemed to be lifted and the handshake was broken. "It was a pleasure to meet you, Marissa. I should get going. Have a great day, you two," Dr. Alder excused himself and set off.

"I never liked him," Marissa muttered, staring after him.

"Either way we should go," Taylor objected, grabbed her friend's hand and pulled her away.

Taylor pulled her friend along the pier when suddenly Marissa demanded, "Wait look." Confused Taylor turned to see her friend pointing at a display in a shop window. It was a pin board, which held various newspaper clippings. Looking up, Taylor saw that they were standing in front of the house for the lifeguards. Then her gaze went back to the small clipping, which Marissa was pointing at and froze. The headline of the article read, "Irish tourist saved from heart attack." "A male tourist, who was in his late twenties and came from Ireland, had a heart attack on the beach. Thanks to the quick aid from the lifeguards he was able to live and he was transferred to the hospital not far from the beach," Marissa summed up, "That article is 13 years old."

"My dad," Taylor whispered, horrified.

"Relax. He's alright," Marissa replied, "They saved him."

"Then maybe they know where he is now," Taylor said, hopefully, "I know where the hospital is. It's not far by water."

"Then lets go," Marissa answered and the two hurried down the steps of pier to the beach. Underneath the pier they jumped into the water and zoomed off.

* * *

><p>A bit further away Zane and the girls had arrived at a dirt bike track. Although he had promised motorcycles, he thought this might be a good place to start. There were obviously very hard tracks with jumps and bumps, but it also had a beginner track that just went in a circle. A bike was already waiting for them when they came out on the track in their protective gear. "Now wait here. I just have to talk with Andrew for a bit," Zane told them as he walked over to the owner, who was a friend out of younger days.<p>

Amber rolled her eyes as she watched her dad and his friend talk animatedly. "This is going to take forever," she complained as she put on helmet.

"What are you doing?" Emily asked, eying her friend.

"What's it look like?" Amber retorted as she got on the bike and started it. Giving power, she zoomed off as her friends watched with horror.

Zane, attracted by the sound of a starting engine, ran to the track. "Amber, get back here this instant!" he yelled, his head turning bright red in rage and worry. Although she wore a helmet, they onlookers could swear that Amber was smiling.

As she completed her round without any accidents and came to a stop in front of her friends. "That was amazing," Rachel congratulated her friend.

Just then Zane raced up to them, demanding, "What were you thinking! Told you to wait!"

Amber revealed a big smile as she removed her helmet. "Oh relax," Amber replied, calmly.

"Relax! You could have gotten seriously hurt!" Zane yelled and then added more softly, "Your mother would have killed me."

"Do you honestly think mom would have let me come here, if she didn't know what I was doing?" Amber questioned and received a confused look from everyone, "Mom and I learned the basics here a while back. We never told you, because we knew how much you missed it."

Zane's face lost several shades of pink as he leaned against the bike for support. "Don't ever do that again," he told her. It was meant as a threat, but came out meek.

"Okay," Amber smiled. With a sigh Zane turned to the rest of the girls. How did he get such rebellious women. "Anyone else want to give me a heart attack?" he asked. The rest of the girls shook their heads. To be honest none of them were too keen on riding dirt bikes, but it did seem interesting, to say the least. "Good," Zane muttered.

* * *

><p>Meanwhile Taylor and Marissa arrived at the hospital. A large sign proclaimed the name and that it had an adjoined rehab facility. One of the best apparently. "Here we are," Taylor muttered, nervously. Would this place bring her closer to her father? Marissa didn't reply and simply walked inside. Taylor hurried after her.<p>

Inside they were met by the hustle and bustle of a hospital as well as the antiseptic smell. "I hate hospitals too," Marissa muttered as she pulled Taylor to the reception.

"Good day. How may I help you?" the receptionist, a blond woman asked them.

Taylor looked at her for a moment before answering, "We're looking for a patient. His name is Rory Walsh."

The receptionist frowned. "I'm sorry. I can't give out such information, unless you can identify yourself as his relative," she told them. Taylor's heart crashed to the ground. It was over. The only proof she had was a toy ring.

"But it was over 10 years ago," Marissa protested.

"Even so, I can't. All our records are confidential and are kept on our computers," the receptionist retorted, "Good day."

With that she ended the conversation and turned to a doctor, who was waiting beside them. Taylor sulked off towards a chair. "It's over," she whispered, her head in her palms.

"No, it's not," Marissa objected, "We have come too far to let it end."

Taylor looked up. "What are you planning?" she questioned.

"Just wait," Marissa smiled as she looked over to the reception.

When the lobby had pretty much emptied, Marissa knew her time had come. With a flick of her hand, she made a mug of coffee tip over and spill all over the receptionist's skirt. With a cry of pain and surprise she jumped up, huge stain on her clothes. Quickly she hurried to the back, leaving the reception unguarded.

Quickly Marissa and Taylor snuck behind the desk and opened the databank of the computer that stood there. They typed in Rory Walsh and pressed enter. With baited breath they awaited the results.

A single beep cut through the tension and shattered all hope at the same time. There was no Rory Walsh in the system. Taylor stared at the screen. It couldn't be. This wasn't possible. Suddenly she was pulled away by Marissa, who saw the receptionist returning. Swiftly the two hurried out of the hospital. "It was all for nothing," Taylor whispered, her head hanging low. She felt Marissa's arm around her shoulder and knew to appreciate the silent comfort.

"Excuse me," a voice said, making the girls turn around. It was an

old doctor. The same doctor, who had been at the reception earlier. "I'm sorry to interrupt, but I couldn't help overhearing inside that you were looking for Rory Walsh," he told them and the two nodded, "I might be able to help you."

Shocked the two looked up at him. "How?" Taylor asked.

"I was his doctor while he stayed here," the man explained.

"But his name wasn't in the system," Marissa objected.

"He entered under the name Rory Hartley," the doctor went on and Taylor's eyes widened, recognizing her mother's maiden name, "May I assume that one of you is Taylor?"

Taylor slowly nodded. "I'm Taylor and this is my friend Marissa. We're looking for my father," she said, softly, "Do you know where he is now?"

The doctor looked to the side. "Come with me," he said and led the two towards the rehab building. "My name is Dr. Smith, by the way," he introduced himself.

"So do you know where my dad is, Dr. Smith?" Taylor asked again.

"Your dad was brought in with a heart attack 13 years ago. He was lucky then. Do you know why he had a heart attack at such a young age?" the doctor told them and the pair shook their heads, "Due to his drinking. The amount of alcohol was damaging the heart. I convinced Rory to participate in rehab to save his life. He agreed so that he could have you back. Rory told me that your mother had left him and he had come here looking for her. However he realized that he was chasing a fantasy and after the heart attack realized he only wanted one thing. He wanted you, Taylor. He wanted to sober up, get a job and take you back." Taylor stared at the doctor, feeling a deep connection with the man called Rory, whom she didn't really know.

"But he never came back for her," Marissa pointed out, "Is he still here?"

"Sadly no," Dr. Smith answered, "His rehab was progressing nicely when we discovered that he had liver cancer, caused by both his alcohol consumption, but also bad genetics." Dread started to rise in Taylor and then she looked up ahead at the path they were taking and her heart stopped. It led to a small cemetery. "I'm very sorry," the doctor said, "Although we spotted the cancer, it was too late. It had manifested over the years. We were able to keep it at bay for a year, but then he died." As he said those final words they stopped in front of a grave. Engraved was Rory's name and his birth and death date.

Taylor could only stare at the grave. It didn't seem real. She had found her father. In a sense. The doctor's voice seemed so far away. "Your father had a great spirit. Even in his advanced stage of the illness, he entertained children in the hospital. He tried to stay positive," Dr. Smith told her, "I'll leave you alone for a moment." The doctor turned on his heel and walked off, leaving Marissa and Taylor alone.

Taylor dropped to her knees. When she had imagined meeting her father again, it definitely hadn't been like this, but even now she expected to cry. However instead it just felt distant and cold. A warm hand came to rest on her shoulder. Marissa's. "I'm sorry, Taylor," she whispered and it sounded sincere.

"I imagined it so many times, but never like this," Taylor replied.

"I know," Marissa muttered. They remained like that for what seemed like an eternity.

Finally Dr. Smith returned with a small shoebox. Intrigued the two straightened. "These are a few things he left behind in case someone ever came looking for him," the doctor explained and opened the box. Inside was the matching ring to Taylor's and a folded up piece of paper. Taylor pulled out her own ring and compared the two. Next she picked up the letter. "He wrote it a week before his death," Dr. Smith told her.

Carefully as though it were an ancient artifact, Taylor unfolded the letter.

_Dearest Taylor, _

When and if you get this, I will be gone, but I am happy. It means you have not forgotten about your roots, no matter how poor they might be, and you came looking for me. That makes me happier than anything else in the world. I'm sorry I was unable to get you back from the foster home and it pains me to know that I will not be there for any more birthdays or other holidays. Hopefully you grew up well in a nice family. I am sure you have or will grow up well. Keep the ring close to your heart as it is a sign of your parents love for each other.

_From the person who will always love you, _

_Your father _

_P.S. Have you met your mother? If so please tell herâ€|. _

Slowly Taylor picked up a photo, which had been under the letter. It showed a young man with a baby on his arm. Her father and herself. A tear rolled down her face. He really loved her. He always had. "Why did my dad give all this to you?" Taylor asked, when she has calmed a bit.

"Rory was a close patient of mine. We got to know each other over the year very well," Dr. Smith answered.

"Thank you," Taylor whispered, "For everything."

"You're welcome," Dr. Smith smiled, "I'm glad someone finally came to find him."

"Would it be alright, if I brought someone here?" Taylor asked.

"Bring as many as you like. I'm sure Rory would like that," Dr. Smith

replied, but suddenly his pager beeped, "I guess I should get going. If you have any more questions, please come find me. It was a pleasure to meet you all." With that he took his leave.

The two girls were left behind in silence. "He was nice," Marissa said, "For a human."

"Not every human is bad, Marissa," Taylor replied, "Sarah, Emily, Amber and Rachel are great people too."

"If you say so," Marissa muttered in disbelief.

"Marissa, for me, meet them. Talk to them," Taylor proposed, looking at her friend, "You'll see you could get along well."

Marissa stared at Taylor, but finally said, "Okay, but only for you."

"Thank you," Taylor replied, "I'll come with them later down to the beach. However right now I have something else I have to do." Her voice became grave.

After a phone call and a while later, Taylor met Bella, Will and her friends at the entrance to the rehab facility. "You really found him?" Bella asked, the excitement in her voice clearly there, "Where is he?"

Taylor had been able to tell her the truth over the phone. Instead she led the group in silence to the cemetery. Marissa had taken her leave, not wanting to meet up with them accidentally. In front of it Taylor turned to her mother, who had turned as white as a sheet and whispered, "I'm sorry."

By Rory's grave she fell to her knees, sobbing. Will kneeled down beside her, trying his best to comfort her. Bella had never imagined this end for her ex boyfriend. Could she have changed his fate, if she had stayed back then? "If you see your mother, please tell her to not blame herself. She deserves a happy life with someone who will make her happy. Knowing that she hasn't forgotten you or me and that I have been kept in good memory, is all I need to be happy. So smile, my dearest Bella," Taylor recited the end of the letter, making her mother look up, "He left a letter. That's what it said for you."

After Taylor had finished telling them everything, Bella straightened and smiled down at the grave. "This is how you wanted it, isn't it, Rory," she smiled, wiping the last tears away. Bella stepped towards her daughter and hugged her. "Thank you, Taylor," she whispered, "Thank you for finding him."

"And don't worry, Rory," Will said, "I'll take good care of them for you. At least as much as they will allow."

After one last goodbye the group headed back to the entrance. Everyone was about to get in the car when Taylor spoke up, "Why don't we leave the two alone?"

The girls exchanged curious looks, but complied with Taylor's request. "So we're going to walk home?" Amber asked as they watched the car leave.

"We can go along the beach," Taylor suggested and the group headed for it. She still didn't know how to tell them about Marissa without starting an all out war.

"So how are you feeling?" Rachel asked, looking at her friend worried.

"Actually I feel fine. I'm happy I found him," Taylor answered, honestly, her hand touching the ring in her pocket.

"I'm still amazed you found it all by yourself," Sarah told her.

"Honestlyâ€|," Taylor began and looked around the people for a familiar face. When she didn't spot Marissa initially, she did a complete 360, but to no avail. Marissa was not there. She had bailed on her.

Her friends noticed the confused and later disappointed look on her face. "Is everything alright?" Emily asked.

"Yeah," Taylor answered, meekly, giving a less than convincing smile, "I thought someone was watching us." The girls glanced around themselves. None of them had noticed anything, obviously.

"This sucks," Amber muttered as she stomped through the sand, "Next time we're taking the car." Everyone, but Taylor, hurried to catch up to her. Taylor stopped once more to look around. No Marissa. She had been stood up. Quickly Taylor shook her head. Marissa would never ditch on a promise she made with her. Or would she? Had the last two days meant nothing to her. With uncertainty in her head, Taylor ran after her friends.

****A/N: **Taylor has found her dad and now only one thing from her past is holding her back. Why did Marissa not show up? Did Marissa truly ditch her friend or is more behind her absence. Please review.**

22. Conference

****A/N: College is going well so far. Luckily I still have enough time to upload. We're getting down to the wire with this story though. I hope there aren't too many typos. I have a new computer and I'm not used to the keyboard yet. Anyway thanks to all my readers and reviewers. Here is chapter 22. Enjoy!****

****Anonamous I don't think you're being rude. In fact I find your reviews quite helpful, seeing they help me improve my writing. Plus I like things right too. ;)****

Previously... Taylor is determined to find her father, but doesn't want the help of the others. On her quest she meets up with Marissa who helps her. Together they find out that Taylor's father is dead, but both Taylor and Bella are able to come to terms with it. Also Taylor convinces Marissa to meet the other to talk, but Marissa never shows up. Now on to the chapter._

Chapter 22: Conference

"Remember class," Mr. Martin reminded them as they sat in the study hall, "Your exams are coming up. If you haven't started to study by now, please do not hesitate to do so." The group of five girls quietly lowered their heads into their books. Due to the recent events, the looming exams had been forgotten. Until now. Now the exams were the most important thing on everyone's minds, except one's. Taylor still couldn't believe that Marissa had betrayed her. No matter how she tried her to get her mind onto studying, her thoughts always came right back to Marissa. Why did she do it?

"Taylor," a voice said, breaking her thoughts. Taylor looked up.

"What?" she asked, looking up at Rachel, who had spoken to her.

"Do you know the answer to the problem?" Sarah questioned, pointing to a problem on their practice papers. Taylor looked at it for a second and shook her head.

"Is everything alright?" Emily inquired, "You've been acting weird ever since you found out about your dad."

"It's nothing," Taylor whispered and looked down at her own question paper. How could she tell them that she had planned on making them meet their worst enemy?

Just then the bell rang. "I guess we should go home and study some more," Amber groaned.

"We have a lot to catch up on," Emily reminded her with a sigh. Normally she wasn't one to forget, let alone procrastinate on studies, but this time there had been so much going on.

"Don't remind me," Rachel muttered as the group left the classroom.

"Hey, you don't have to worry about science. That's one subject less," Sarah pointed out as they made their way through the hallways.

"Yeah, well geography counts double for me," Rachel objected, jokingly.

Outside Taylor walked straight ahead, instead of following the others to the right. "Taylor, where are you going?" Rachel asked, noticing her friend's change of direction.

"I have something I need to do," was all Taylor said and moved on without another word. Unsure the four watched their friend. What were they supposed to do?

As soon as she was out of view from her, Taylor hurried to a secluded part on the beach. If she could find Marissa, she would find her around here somewhere, but as she looked around, she was nowhere to be seen. "Marissa!" Taylor yelled at the ocean. Nothing. "Marissa, I know you're there!" Taylor screamed, cupping her hands around her mouth. Still nothing. Taylor turned around, half expecting her friend to sneak up on her from behind, but no one was there. Taylor dropped

to her knees. Where was Marissa? Was she so mad at Taylor that she refused to even look at her? Why was she mad at her? Tears rolled down Taylor's cheeks. She didn't want to lose her friend.

When all her tears had ebbed Taylor got up. She slowly walked to Emily's house, which was where Taylor knew she would find her friends. Taylor found them in the kitchen. All four looked up when the sedated blonde entered the room, worried looks being shot at her.

Taylor didn't even notice them. She simply sat down at her usual place and asked, "So where are you right now?"

"Math," Amber groaned, rubbing her head.

"Is there any class you actually like?" Rachel asked, curiously.

"Yeah. Lunch," Amber grinned.

Sarah and Emily shook their heads in disbelief. "And you wonder why you're so bad in school?" Emily questioned.

"No," Amber simply replied.

"Back to the books," Sarah instructed, seeing a big discussion coming towards them, if she didn't get them back on track.

Suddenly Emma appeared at the door.

"Girls, I think you should look at this," she told them, pointing at the TV where the news were on. She didn't sound happy. Confused the five girls looked up from their books, but then followed her. There had to be a good reason for it.

Just as they entered the living room the female news reporter said, "World renowned Australian scientist Dr. Alder has announced a special conference, inviting not only his colleagues, but the media as well. When he was asked what this meeting was about, Dr. Alder said that he finally found evidence that we are not alone on this planet, that there is more in our oceans than we know of. When he was asked what he meant, he would not give an answer. It seems we will have to wait until tomorrow to know what this amazing discovery is."

The five girls stared at each other. They didn't need to be at the conference to know what Dr. Alder was talking about. Mermaids. Emma, Ash and James, who had been watching the news, also knew. James' eyes rested on Taylor worryingly. "How does he have any evidence?" James finally asked, breaking the silence, "It's not like you would give him some of your DNA willingly."

Shocked Taylor's head shot up. It couldn't be. Although nothing else made sense, she prayed it wasn't so. The other four exchanged a look, as if checking that to see if all five of them were really there and not just a figment of their imagination. "I thought all the evidence was destroyed," Sarah said, worried.

"He's lying. He has no evidence," Amber assured her.

"The scale was destroyed," Rachel guaranteed them.

"But he wouldn't call a conference, if he didn't have anything on us," Emily objected.

"Maybe it's a trap," Amber suggested.

"Not a very well-disguised one though," Sarah pointed out.

"I just don't think Dr. Alder would do something without being sure that he didn't have a plan. Just accusing doesn't seem like him," Rachel objected, thoughtfully. She knew the scientist well and it just didn't seem like his style.

Taylor simply listened. She had to voice her fear, even if it meant getting into quite a bit of trouble. "No, he has evidence," Taylor finally whispered, softly.

Confused the others looked at her. "What do you mean?" Emily asked.

"He must have Marissa," Taylor told them.

"Stop joking. No way would Marissa let herself be captured by such an idiot. Why do you even think that?" Amber inquired.

Taylor took a shaking breath. "Because I wanted you to meet her a day ago," Taylor confessed.

There was a moment of silence before they exclaimed, "What!"

Taylor flinched at their outburst. "Truth be told Marissa helped me find my father," Taylor explained, "I was able to convince her that she should meet you. I wanted you to finally talk, but she never showed up."

The four stared at her, remembering Taylor's strange behavior. Finally Sarah asked, "Why didn't you want our help to find your father?" She sounded hurt.

Taylor looked to the side. "It's hard to explain. It was just a lot easier to ask Marissa for help with it. She just understood how much it meant to me," Taylor explained.

"We might not understand as well, but we wanted to help too," Rachel objected, looking at her.

"I know," Taylor whispered.

"So is that the only reason you think Marissa was kidnapped?" Amber asked, "Maybe she just got bored and went back to Ireland."

"No, Marissa wouldn't do that. Something is wrong. I can feel it," Taylor assured them.

"But even so Dr. Alder has no idea what Marissa looks like, right? How could he just by chance grab a mermaid?" Sarah inquired.

Suddenly Taylor's body became rigid. "What's wrong?" Emily

questioned.

"Yesterdayâ€¦ Taylor and I met Dr. Alder by chance. He knows Marissa and if he followed us then he knew where we were heading," Taylor recalled. How could she have forgotten it until now? Horror started to rise in Taylor. If the scientist went that far to capture a mermaid, Marissa was not safe with him.

"Well, then I think it's my turn," Rachel said and got up.

"What do you mean?" Taylor asked, confused.

"If anyone can talk to Dr. Alder it's me. It's too dangerous for you," Rachel answered.

"But don't take any unnecessary risks, you hear," Emily reminded her. None of them liked the idea of Rachel going to the mad scientist alone, but she had a had a connection that none of the other had to the scientist. If anyone could get anything out of him, it was Rachel. Rachel nodded and walked off.

A while later Rachel stood in front of Dr. Alder's research boat. Taking a deep breath, she boarded. As usual she found the scientist in his lab. "Ah, Rachel, it's been a while. How are you?" he greeted her when he noticed her presence.

"Good. It seems so have you. I heard about the conference you called tomorrow," Rachel answered.

"Yes, I'm sure it will revolutionize the way we humans think," Dr. Alder told her.

"Really? It must be quite the discovery. What did you find, if I may ask?" Rachel inquired.

Dr. Alder smiled at her. "Now if I told you now, why bother having the meeting tomorrow," he told her, "Tell you what. Here's an invitation. I know you appreciate science as much as me." With that he handed her the invitation. Rachel frowned.

Then the direct approach, she decided. "Thank you," she said, "Does this discovery have anything to do with the specimen you took from me?"

"How could that be possible? Didn't every specimen I have get destroyed in the fire?" Dr. Alder pointed out.

"You're right," Rachel replied, realizing that he would not say anything that would give him away, "Well, Dr. Alder. Have a good day. We'll see each other tomorrow."

"Good day to you too," the scientist replied with a smile.

Rachel frowned. Even though Dr. Alder had revealed nothing, she knew he had Marissa by the way he acted. No matter how Rachel saw it, Dr. Alder was her opponent. The others were mermaids and thus they could fight Marissa, but she was a human could only fight Dr. Alder evenly. Plus she had developed an interesting relationship of admiration and hate between them. Rachel sighed. She had to think of something.

Dr. Alder's eyes followed Rachel as she left his boat and the pier. Looking at the clock, he decided it was time to pay someone a visit. He exited his boat and walked down the street until he came to a building. In this building he would tomorrow be made into the most renowned scientist in the world. Everyone would know his name. The scientist strode down the many aisles of chairs and onto the stage. Behind the curtain was a door and through it was the reason of his success tomorrow.

In a glass cage sat Marissa. She glared at him as he walked in. "And how are we doing today?" Dr. Alder asked with a smile.

"Go to hell," Marissa snapped.

"Isn't someone a little grumpy? Why? I'm going to make you famous? Tomorrow millions of people will want to know you. Doesn't the prospect excite you?" the scientist questioned, stepping in front of the cage.

"You are just like all the other humans. Cold hearted and only looking out for yourself. You're despicable," Marissa spat, "I knew there was a reason I hated humans. You're the perfect example of one."

Dr. Alder smiled evilly. "And yet you are my prisoner, superior being," he joked, looking at Marissa's bound hands, "Who thought it would be so easy to capture and retain a mermaid, if her hands are bound." Marissa looked down at her hands. Her hands had been squeezed into metal gloves, which made it impossible for her to move them. He had indeed found the only weakness of a mermaid. If she can't use her hands, she is unable to conjure the water. Marissa was as helpless as any other human in this situation.

"I just had to wait long enough and observe you. It was simple enough," the scientist gloated with a wide grin as he stepped forward. Marissa could only guess he had seen more than he should have the day before and maybe even before that, but had seen a way to strike then.

"Yeah, hitting someone over the head from behind is a real stroke of genius," Marissa muttered, cynically.

Dr. Alder ignored her and said, "Now show me that form again." With the press of a button a bucket of water dumped itself all over Marissa, transforming her into a mermaid.

"Magnificent," the scientist grinned, as his eyes ran over Marissa's tail, "Never in my wildest dreams would I have believed mermaids to be real."

"So you're a pervert too," Marissa murmured, not at all surprised.

"I am lucky that I caught you, my dear," he replied, ignoring her jab at him, "I don't know what happened between you and the other girls, but you only get along with Taylor. They will not come to your rescue. Furthermore I can extract my revenge for my boat that you must have destroyed."

"Yeah, that was me," Marissa smiled smugly, remembering the burning

boat, "As for the others, I don't need them. I'll get out of here without their help."

"I would like to see you try," Dr. Alder retorted and left. Marissa stared after him. She slammed her hands in the metal gloves against the glass, but it wouldn't even cause a scratch. Trying to move her hands, she found it impossible. Marissa leaned back against her prison wall. She wasn't getting out of here any time soon.

* * *

><p>Meanwhile Rachel had reported back to her friends. "If he is hiding her, then he wouldn't let on about it," she finished her story.<p>

"Then how do we find Marissa, if she really is his prisoner?" Taylor asked.

"I got an invitation," Rachel reminded them, "We have to strike tomorrow. Right before the conference starts."

"But that could put us all at risk," Emily pointed out.

"We'll be at risk, if Dr. Alder spills about mermaids," Amber retorted, surprising everyone by taking Taylor's and with that Marissa's side.

"Amber's right. We have nothing to lose either way," Sarah agreed.

"Don't worry, Taylor," Rachel assured her friend, "I won't let Marissa be revealed."

Taylor was about to ask what Rachel meant with that, but just then a phone rang. All five girls wiped out their cell phones. Taylor's didn't receive while all of the other four had received texts from their boyfriends, asking them, if they're alright. They had probably just heard of Dr. Alder's press release and instantly figured it out. The girls smiled as they assured them that they were all fine.

"So when is that conference tomorrow?" Emily asked when they finally put their phones away.

"In the afternoon during science class," Rachel replied, nonchalant.

"You really think Mr. Martin will let us go?" Sarah questioned.

"Why not? It's science and he own friend's big unveiling," Amber pointed out.

"If he doesn't give permission then I'm going anyway," Taylor told them.

"We'll all go anyway," Rachel corrected her. Sarah and Amber nodded, while Emily nodded, though more hesitant. She hated skipping class.

The next afternoon the girls left school early. Although they would have had science, Rachel had gone to Mr. Martin and explained that

she had tickets for her and all of the rest of her friends to go to Dr. Alders' revealing. When she said that Mr. Martin instantly allowed them to go. He knew of Rachel's interest for science and wished himself he could be there, instead of watching exam preparations. None the less he wished them a lot of fun. If only he knew, Rachel thought. He would probably be devastated to hear what his friend did in his free time.

The five girls arrived at the building, in which the unveiling was supposed to happen. Rachel noticed several high ranked scientists and many news stations in the masses.

"You think they'll let you in with a backpack?" Emily asked, motioning towards the backpack on Rachel's back.

"What's in there anyway that you couldn't leave at home?" Amber questioned.

"Nothing important," Rachel replied and went on. Sarah didn't like the crowds all too much, fearing that they might get recognized by someone, while Taylor still worried about Marissa. What if they had been completely wrong with their assumption? Confidently Rachel strode over to the bouncers. They looked surprised to see a group of young girls here, but said nothing when Rachel handed them the ticket. With the slightest of nods they were let inside.

The inside of the building was filled from wall to wall with rows of chairs. Some were reserved, others free to sit on. It was already packed. There was roughly a quarter hour before the unveiling was about to start. Rachel looked around. "Make sure that Dr. Alder doesn't see you or he might suspect something," she warned them as the rest nodded, keeping their eyes peeled for the scientist.

"Marissa must be behind the curtain," Taylor said.

"We can't just walk onto the stage without being noticing," Emily pointed out.

"Leave it to me," Rachel smiled, "Get into position. You'll know when your time comes."

"You planned a lot, didn't you?" Amber asked, impressed. Rachel simply smiled.

"Be careful," Sarah warned her. Rachel nodded.

In the distance Rachel saw Dr. Alder making his way towards them. Quickly she shooed her friends away and turned to him. "Dr. Alder, thank you so much for the invite," Rachel said.

"It's my pleasure," he replied, looking around, "You didn't bring any of your friends with you?"

"No, they have to study. Exams are coming up, so they're in school studying science," Rachel lied, happy he hadn't spotted the rest yet. She let her gaze glide over the crowd and she found what she was looking for. Her friends were at the stage. Perfect.

"That is unfortunate," Dr. Alder replied and went on talking about

how great it's going to be.

Meanwhile Rachel fixed her eyes on her target. A small water tank where people could get refreshments. Behind her back Rachel moved her hand and activated her power, causing the water to boil until the container exploded, due to the pressure. The crowd let out cries as they turned to the scene. "Excuse me," Dr. Alder told Rachel, who simply nodded, and then he hurried off to calm the crowd. Rachel looked to find her friends gone. Pleased she smiled. So far everything was going according to plan. With that she turned on her heel and hurried off. The next part of her plan had to be set in motion.

* * *

><p>Meanwhile the four mermaids had used the distraction to slip behind the curtains of the stage. Behind it they saw a huge glass tank with Marissa inside it. She looked surprised to see them. "Marissa," Taylor breathed and hurried to the tank's glass.<p>

"What are you doing here?" Marissa hissed, although she couldn't hide her astonishment.

"Amazingly enough, we're here to save you," Amber retorted, though she didn't hide her dislike for the mermaid.

"Why the hell would you do that? It's too dangerous for you," Marissa demanded to know, "I could get out myself."

"Really? I'd love to see that," Amber told her with a smirk.

"Stop it, both of you," Emily ordered, stepping between them, "Right now, we're in this together so act like it."

"I still didn't ask for your help," Marissa pouted.

"But I'm not letting you become a science experiment," Taylor retorted, "How do we get you out of there?"

"Well, come up with a way to get my cuffs off and the rest doesn't matter," Marissa pointed out, holding up her hands for them to see.

"Let me," Amber muttered and stepped forward raising her hand, "But don't think I'm doing this for you. I'm only doing this for Taylor."

"Of course," Marissa scowled, "Now get me out." Amber glared at her, but still balled her hand, causing the glass to melt.

Carefully Marissa stepped out, not touching the edges of molten glass. "Now get me out of these," Marissa said.

"How about a please?" Sarah recommended.

"The sooner I'm free, the sooner we can go our separate ways," Marissa reminded them. The others frowned. She had a point. None of them wanted to be longer together than needed.

"Are you alright otherwise?" Taylor asked.

"I'm fine," Marissa replied in the nicest voice any of the others had heard from her so far. Apparently Taylor triggered a nice mode.

Emily looked around and spotted something on a table nearby. A small key. Quickly she hurried over, grabbed it and came to Marissa. Emily put the key in the hole and it fit. With a turn the cuffs loosened, enabling Marissa to slip her hands out. Moving her fingers she tried to get the blood flowing in them again.

"We have to get out of here before the presentation starts," Taylor reminded them. Frantically they looked around for a backdoor, but there was none.

"Then we have to go back over the stage and hope no one sees us," Emily suggested and they hurried to the curtain.

"May I have your attention? I wish to welcome everyone who is here today," a voice boomed through the loudspeakers and the girls froze. They were too late. Their last exit had just been sealed by Dr. Alder stepping upon the stage. They were trapped and once Dr. Alder opened the curtain they would all be exposed. "I'm not a man of many words, so I'll keep it short. We have all heard the myths of mystical half fish, half human beings that lived in the ocean. Where did these come from? I now hold the answer to the so called mermaid legend," the scientist proclaimed and the girls could feel the suspense rising in the audience, "Behind this curtain is the answer." Dr. Alder smiled. He was going to be the most famous scientist with just one click of a button.

Behind the curtain the girls were freaking out. What were they supposed to do? Suddenly someone ran past them and ordered, "Hide in the corner." They stared at the person, who they knew so well. It was Rachel, but she now donned a long blond wig and had put in contacts. She now bore a striking resemblance to Marissa. However to make matters even weirder she was wearing a seashell bikini top and what looked to be like tail made of ocean blue cloth, even with a fin. Although she did look like a mermaid out of the myths and cartoons that everyone knew, she looked nothing like the mermaids they were. "Go," she hissed as she climbed through the hole into the tank. The others quickly did as they were told.

A split second later Dr. Alder pressed the button and the curtain swished aside, revealing the mermaid in the tank. A gasp of amazement went through the crowd. A split second later water from the bucket above Rachel came down on her. The instant the water touched her skin, lightning raced through her and Rachel gritted her teeth in pain. The shocks seemed a lot worse than they were before and it took all Rachel had not to cry out. Marissa's eyes widened. Why did she do it, if it hurt her? What did she have to gain from saving her? The others didn't notice, because their attention was on the audience, who they could see around the corner.

Finally the bucket was empty and Rachel straightened. The crowd broke out in murmurs. They stared and pointed. Camera lights flashed. The tail Rachel wore had a rip all the way up, revealing her very human legs. "Dr. Alder, there is a slight problem," Rachel suddenly spoke up, making the scientist realize that something wasn't right, his smile freezing on his lips.

His eyes widened as they fell on her. "What?" Dr. Alder stammered, horrified.

"I'm so sorry, Dr. Alder. I tripped over it and it ripped," Rachel explained, with big eyes and an innocent voice as she stepped out of the tank, dripping wet, "I was going to tell you, but you were already on stage. So I thoughtâ€¦ Oh maybe this wasn't such a good ideaâ€¦"

The five girls behind the curtain only stared, Marissa most of all. That the heck was Rachel doing. Suddenly the crowd was in an uproar. "He was trying to trick us!" one person yelled.

Another exclaimed, "Making a poor girl do such a thing! Have you no morals!" Millions of cameras flashed, capturing Dr. Alder's plummeting career. Rachel gave the crowd another big eyes confused expression before turning to Dr. Alder with a smirk. It was over.

The people flooded out of the building and soon it was only Dr. Alder and Rachel left alone on the stage. "You," he hissed, glaring at her.

"It's over, Dr. Alder. After today no one will believe another word you say," Rachel smiled.

"You ruined everything!" he yelled and stormed towards her. Rachel tried to step back, but tripped over her fake tail, landing on the ground hard. The now mad scientist loomed over her. "I will make you pay," he snarled as he came closer and closer.

"Touch her and you die," a voice snapped and he looked up to see Marissa standing not far away, her hand raised at him.

Slowly, with his hands raised, Dr. Alder stepped back. "You got me," he said.

"That is not enough," Marissa retorted, "I'm going to make you pay." With that Marissa activated her power, causing Dr. Alder to start to heat up. His breath became gasping and his skin flushed. The scientist went down on his knees. Horrified the girls watched Marissa. "This is for all you have done," she told him and was about to intensify her attack once more when Rachel jumped in front of Dr. Alder and exclaimed, "Stop it!" She didn't like the scientist, yes, but she did not want him dead.

Instantly Marissa released her magic grasp. "Why are you shielding him after all he has done to you?" she demanded, "He has to be taught a lesson."

"But not like this," Emily spoke up, stepping next to Rachel.

"Can't you see we already took everything that's important from him?" Sarah asked, also joining them.

"We shouldn't abuse our powers to hurt other people," Amber agreed, walking up to the rest. Taylor watched from the side, not knowing which side to choose.

"After all he's done to you, you let him go?" Marissa asked and then turned to Taylor, "I'm sorry, but we won't be able to cooperate. We are far too different. You are all too blinded by humans to see the real danger they pose for us." With that Marissa walked off the stage towards the exit.

"Marissa!" Taylor exclaimed, but her friend wouldn't even turn around. Taylor's legs wouldn't move and so she was forced to sit on the ground.

"Are you alright, Rachel?" Sarah asked, looking at her friend. Rachel nodded.

"Was this your plan all along?" Emily inquired, while Amber asked, "Why didn't you tell us?"

"Cause this was a fight between me and him," Rachel answered, nodding towards the scientist.

"Why did you do it at all?" Taylor asked, looking at her.

"Because, even if she won't admit it, she's one of us," Rachel replied, pulling off the wig as she looked over to Marissa, "Sorry, I kind of had to borrow her look."

"We are not alike!" Marissa snapped, turning around at the door, "I will not take pity on my adversary for any reason!"

"You just wait and see," Rachel said as she watched Marissa leave.

No matter how much Marissa hated the fact, she could not deny that Rachel intrigued her. She had been willingly taken the fall for her. This Rachel girl deserved more of her undivided attention and Marissa would make sure she got it soon.

Back in the building Dr. Alder stared at Rachel. "Why?" was all he asked, perplexed.

"Dr. Alder, I have great respect for you as a scientist, but I draw the line when you try to endanger my friends. Now no one will ever believe anything you say. It doesn't matter what evidence you get on us," Rachel explained.

"Then why didn't you let her kill me?" the scientist spat, "My life has no meaning now."

"Don't ever say that! No one should be hurt in a battle that only concerns mermaids," Rachel answered, firmly, "I still believe you are a genius, but possibly misguided. I hope you will find your path once more now that you have time to return to the simple things."

The scientist gaped at her. "Thank you for saving me," he finally said, "Maybe you will one day come visit me and we could research something together. I see a great future ahead for you Rachel. Not only as a scientist, but as a human."

"Thank you, Dr. Alder," Rachel replied, happy about the praise.

"May I leave now?" he asked and the rest nodded. Dr. Alder quickly

got up and hurried off, only to be bombarded outside by the reporters.

"That was pretty impressive, Rachel," Taylor said, coming up to them, "Thank you for saving Marissa."

"But she still won't change her ways," Rachel muttered, unsatisfied.

"Don't worry. We'll make her. You'll see," Amber assured her.

"We did get through to you when you were evil," Sarah reminded her.

"Hey, I was being controlled," Rachel objected, but knew it was a joke.

"You sure about that. You were an evil mastermind just now," Emily joked, motioning towards Rachel's mermaid costume, and the girls had to laugh.

"Thanks you guys," Taylor smiled, "Now how do we get out of here?" The girls stood there a moment thoughtful, seeing the reporters were still outside.

**A/N: **Dr. Alder is no longer a problem. Now Marissa is interested in Rachel and who knows what Marissa will do to find out what she wants? Please review.

23. Target

A/N: Well this story is coming to a close. There will be two more chapters as of now. Whether or not I will do another sequel I can't say. It depends on if I get an idea that I can spin to a story. Maybe I'll stay in the H2O world, maybe not. I can't say yet. Anyway thanks for reading and reviewing. Here is chapter 23. Enjoy!

Anonamous Sorry about the whip. I never get that right. I wish I was one of the H2O girls, but sadly so far it hasn't happened.

Previously... Taylor worries about Marissa when she didn't show up for her meeting. Then Dr. Alder reveals a conference, which the girls know will be about mermaids. Taylor confesses that Marissa helped her and is now Dr. Alder's prisoner. In the end Rachel saves the day with her plan and outs the scientist. He however seems to forgive her. Now on to the chapter.

Chapter 23: Target

Rachel ended the call and put her phone away. She walked slowly across the beach, her backpack slung across her shoulder. It was early morning and the beach was mostly empty. Usually she would have gone to the mermaids' houses and picked them up for school, but today she couldn't. Something was preoccupying her mind and she needed time to think alone.

She slowed to stare out at the water. At one time she had loved the water, but now it only brought her pain. Nearly unbearable pain. It

confused, and even worse, scared her. Why did the thing she had loved so much only a year ago hurt her so much now? What had she done to deserve this?

Carefully Rachel reached out her hand. A hair's width from the surface she froze, her head remembering the pain from yesterday all too well. Mustering all her courage, she dipped her fingertips in. Instantly it felt as though she had put her hand on an electric fence, not water. It coursed through her veins, paralyzing her body. Rachel began to panic. Would she be fried by the thing she loved so much? Frantically she tried to pull her hand back, but the command wouldn't reach her arm.

With the last of her strength Rachel gained a hint of control over her body and pulled her hand from the water. Her entire body shook and spasmed as she dropped to the ground. Every hair stood on end. Taking deep breaths, Rachel tried to calm herself. The water was killing her. It scared her and what was even worse it only seemed to get more painful. At the beginning it was only a weird feeling and now it felt as though she had been struck by lightning.

"Rachel?" a voice asked, making her look up, "Are you alright?" It was Taylor.

Although her body still protested, Rachel sat up. "I'm fine," she smiled. Her mind went haywire. How much had she seen?

"But why are you lying in the sand?" Taylor inquired.

"Just enjoying the nice weather," Rachel answered, looking up at the bright blue sky. Internally she sighed. It seemed not enough to know what was really going on.

"Well, you'll have to enjoy that from inside the classroom," Taylor told her and reached her hand out to Rachel. She took it, but with a yelp, Taylor let go. "You shocked me," she said, "Pretty hard too."

Rachel froze. Her stomach turned as she watched her friend, shake her hand. "Sorry," she replied.

"It's alright. Let's try it again," Taylor smiled and reached her hand out again. Hesitantly Rachel took it, but this time nothing happened and she was pulled up.

"So what are you doing here? You didn't come pick us up," Taylor asked.

"I just wanted to enjoy the morning," Rachel shrugged, "What about you? Where are the others?" She looked around, but couldn't spot the others anywhere.

"I came looking for you. When you didn't show up, I thought you might want some company. The others went on ahead. I figured you would be at the beach and here you are," Taylor smiled and then leaned forward to look at her, "So is something bothering you?"

"Marissa," Rachel half lied. She had been thinking about Marissa too, but mostly about the water.

"You really think she's just like us?" Taylor asked. It gave her a small hope. The thought that someone else beside her believed that Marissa wasn't all bad.

"I obviously can't say what happened to Marissa, but somewhere inside her she's just like us. Otherwise she couldn't possibly be so nice around you," Rachel answered, honestly.

Taylor fell silent for a moment. "You think we can save her?" she finally questioned.

Rachel's gaze fell on the ocean. "I'm definitely going to do everything I can to save her," she retorted as she clenched her fist.

Taylor nodded as her hand slowly reached for Rachel's hand entwined with it. "Thank you," she whispered. She couldn't ask for more.

Rachel still had her gaze on the ocean when a wave suddenly rose up towards them. "Watch out!" Rachel exclaimed as she pushed Taylor out of the way before her hand rose and froze the water. The break of the wave froze only inches from her face. With shaking breath Rachel stepped back. That had been too close. What if Taylor had seen her touch the water? She wouldn't have been able to hide it then. With a flick of her wrist Rachel let the water unfreeze and then she turned to Taylor, who thanks to her shove, laid on the ground. "You alright?" Rachel asked as Taylor got up and dusted herself off.

"Yeah, thanks. That was close," Taylor answered, "But we have to hurry or we'll be late."

They found the three other already sitting in homeroom, waiting for them. "There you are," Sarah smiled, "We missed you this morning."

"Sorry, I just wanted some time to think," Rachel replied.

"You should use that time to studying. The exams are almost upon us," Amber reminded her with a groan, a textbook in front of her proof of the upcoming exams, seeing the usually never studied without a purpose.

"What more the full moon falls right into exam time. This year really isn't looking good for us," Emily pointed out.

"Why don't we lock ourselves in and study then? We have nothing better to do on that evening anyway," Taylor suggested. The four others nodded. Just then the bell rang and their teacher came in.

Finally lunch break was there. "I'm starved," Amber said as they left their classroom, "If I hear one more teacher say that it's important for the exam I'm going to make something explode."

"Be glad they're telling us anything at all," Emily replied.

"They're basically telling us learn everything we've ever been

taught," Amber objected, "How is that helpful?"

"Teachers," Sarah muttered with a shrug, "What do you expect?"

"Let's just forget about them for an hour and have some lunch," Taylor sighed as she shouldered her bag.

"I'll catch up," Rachel told them, "I have to bring a book back to the school library and it's going to close soon."

The four nodded. "We'll save you a sit," Sarah called after her as Rachel walked down a different way.

Deciding to take a shortcut, Rachel exited the school and circled around to the gym. She just had to walk past the pool and across the lawn and she was there. It was a lesser known way so no one passed Rachel as she walked. Going past the fenced in pool, she was glad that swimming currently wasn't part of gym. How was she supposed to explain that she nearly fainted when touching water?

Rachel was forced from her thoughts when a spear of ice suddenly dug itself into the ground just before her. Surprised she stumbled backwards, frantically searching for her attacker. With a smile Marissa turned the corner of the fenced in pool. "Hello Rachel," she said nonchalant, as if she hadn't just attacked her.

"What do you want?" Rachel asked.

"I just want to talk," Marissa answered, "I'm just interested in knowing how you could possibly think we're alike."

She called a bit of water over from the pool and made it float above her hand. Then she froze it into a spear. "Let's just say, if I'm not convinced I can't guarantee for your safety," Marissa told her with a shrug as she unfroze the spear again, letting the water float freely in her hand, "Plus you fascinate me. I would love to hear more about those circumstances of yours. This form of water is a lot more frightening to you than the spear, isn't it?" Rachel stared at her. How did she know? When had she found out? "Did you like my present this morning?" Marissa inquired. Present? Then it hit Rachel. The wave. Why didn't it surprise her. Rachel took a step back.

"Now I hope you're not planning on escaping. I won't be able to guarantee that you'll be less hurt," Marissa smiled, "I just want to talk and depending on your answers we go from there. Now how are we alike?"

She took a step forward, the water in her hand looming over Rachel. "We both care for Taylor. We would do anything for her," Rachel began.

"You think so?" Marissa asked, her eyes narrowing.

"I know so," Rachel retorted, "Otherwise you would never have helped her find her dad."

"That may be, but I will strike her down, if she gets in my way," Marissa said viciously.

"Now be a good girl and come with me. We have lots to discuss," Marissa told her and send forth her tentacle. Rachel stumbled backwards, but she knew she wouldn't be able to escape the tentacle, with or without the bit of magic her necklace possessed, and the pain that would come with it.

"Don't touch her!" a voice exclaimed and suddenly the tentacle's course changed and it zoomed back into the pool. Surprised the two looked up to find Amber, Taylor, Sarah and Emily standing behind Rachel. Sarah had used her magic to control the water, which had only been possible since Marissa hadn't expected her.

"We won't let you take her," Amber told her.

Marissa scowled. "You really think you can stop me, fire girl?" she asked.

"Any day," Amber retorted.

"As much as I would love to see that, I'm afraid I'll have to take a rain check." Before any of them could do anything, Marissa used her magic to kick up dirt. Blinding them, Marissa made her escape unseen.

When the dirt finally settled again, Amber balled her fist. "Damn it," she muttered.

"Are you alright Rachel?" Taylor asked and Rachel nodded.

"What was all that about?" Emily asked.

"She wanted to take me with her to talk to her," Rachel answered.

"Doesn't she mean kidnap you to blackmail us?" Amber corrected her.

"But why is she so interested in you?" Sarah voiced the question that was on everyone's mind.

Rachel froze. She knew why. Instead she shrugged. "Maybe because I believe she is like us?" she guessed, "What are you doing here anyway? How did you know I was in trouble?"

"We noticed that you were taking an awfully long time to return a book, so we went to check on you. It was Taylor who told us you took this shortcut some times," Emily explained. Rachel looked at her friend surprised. Taylor really knew a lot about her. It touched Rachel.

"Well now we have to figure out what we do next," Amber spoke up, making everyone look at her, confused, "It's obvious Marissa will come back for Rachel. We have to protect her. Marissa won't attack, if Rachel isn't alone."

"Wow, for once you actually have a good idea," Emily teased, "You should study more often." Amber simply smirked.

"Isn't that a bit much?" Rachel inquired.

"Do you want to get captured by Marissa?" Sarah retorted, "We know you believe we can help her, but do you really think she'll be kind to you for that reason, if she gets her hands on you?" Rachel fell silent. She didn't know it, but she hoped.

"Anyway, one of us will not leave your side until we come up with a better idea," Amber decreed.

"Then I'll go with you to the library," Taylor offered, "But we have to hurry. Lunch is almost over."

"What!" Amber exclaimed, looking at her watch, "Why? I didn't get to eat anything yet. I have to hurry." Amber hurried off and Emily and Sarah followed with a shrug. They knew no one should mess with Amber when she was hungry.

Rachel and Taylor went on their way to the library. "Do you really think Marissa would hurt you?" she asked. The strain in her voice was clear. She still hoped her friend wasn't evil, but at the same time she stood on the same side as them. Rachel opened her mouth, but then closed it again. She didn't know what to say. Just then they entered the library and Rachel was spared from answering as she hurried to the counter to return the book.

Taylor watched her. What was she going to do? She didn't need to look into the future to know what was going to come. The inevitable showdown was coming, no matter what she did. All that was left was to decide, which side she stood on. On her childhood friend's side or on the mermaids' side she had learned to love and cherish during this short time together. Taylor didn't know. She owed Marissa more than she could repay, but was that a reason to throw herself on a side, whose ideals she didn't agree on.

Just then Rachel came back. "We have to hurry or we'll be late for class," Rachel said. Taking her hand, Rachel pulled Taylor after her. As they hurried through the crowded hallway, Rachel realized what the next class was. Science. How was she supposed to face Mr. Martin after what had happened to Dr. Alder yesterday? Maybe he wouldn't ask. She could only pray that was the case.

However god didn't hear that prayer. In front of the classroom, she found not only Amber, who held an apple in her hand, happily eating it, Sarah and Emily, but Mr. Martin. Rachel's stomach turned. She cared for her science teacher, but she had brought his friend to fall. "Mr. Martin, I'm so sorry," Rachel said. Although she knew he wouldn't fully understand what she was apologizing for, it mattered to her that she did so anyway. "

"I can't believe it," Mr. Martin said, "I didn't want to believe it when I heard what Dr. Alder was supposed to have done. You were all there. Is it really true?"

The four girls looked at Rachel. She knew their science teacher the best and silently decided she should be the one to tell him. "Yes," Rachel whispered her head low. What had she done? She had believed she had been fine with Dr. Alder going down, but she hadn't considered this. Could she look at her teacher ever again without guilt?

"The amazing part is that when I called him to ask, if it was true,

he was so happy. He said he could finally get back to his roots and research whatever he wanted without having pressure," Mr. Martin told them. Rachel was glad that Dr. Alder seemed to be truly happy about what had happened and hadn't just lied to make her feel better yesterday. "It made me think that it was the best thing that ever happened to him," Mr. Martin said, "And I hope he will always remember this lesson." Rachel stared at her teacher. In a sense he was happy that she had done it. She never would have believed that. Never in a million years. It made her feel like she had done the right thing, not just for her and her friends, but for Dr. Alder and his friends.

"Well, let's get going to class. Your exam is tomorrow," Mr. Martin told them and ushered them inside. The class droned on with Mr. Martin going over various things, which would be in the exam, making Amber groan, though she didn't make anything explode.

Suddenly in the middle of the class water hit the window with a crash, making everyone jump. Startled they turned to the window. A sprinkler had somehow managed to hit the window, even though it was theoretically too far away. "Okay, back to studying," Mr. Martin ordered, "It's just water." However Rachel, Taylor, Amber, Sarah and Emily knew better. It had been Marissa's way of saying she was watching them.

"If you have any more questions, please ask them now," Mr. Martin told them, "If you don't ask now, then do not complain tomorrow during the exam." The five girls sat at their table on end. Even though they were fairly sure Marissa wouldn't attack them in class, they knew from the sprinkler incident that they were being watched.

So the rest of the day went by with the girls on edge and being jumpy, much to the displeasure of their teachers. When the bell finally ended their last class, they poured out of their classroom together with the rest of their class. While Emily, Taylor, Amber and Sarah turned to one direction, Rachel walked into another.

"Where are you going Rachel?" Emily asked, perplexed.

"Science club," Rachel answered.

"You have your club even the day before the exam?" Amber asked, astonished.

"Well, it's not mandatory, but a lot of people are going. It's just like studying and we're all kind of hoping Mr. Martin will drop a hint on what's going to be on the exam," Rachel explained.

"I'll go with you then," Sarah offered, not just out of kindness, but hoping she might see Ryan there.

"Listen guys, I appreciate you trying to protect me and all, but I think I'll be fine for a few hours," Rachel told them.

"And what about when you leave?" Taylor objected.

"There are a few, which have the same way home. I'll stick with them. Marissa wouldn't dare attack me then," Rachel retorted, "Don't worry. Marissa hasn't gotten me yet and I won't let her take me without a fight."

"So you won't study with us tonight?" Emily asked.

"Sorry, but I prefer to be by myself the day before an exam," Rachel answered, "Though if Mr. Martin says anything about the exam, I'll tell you. I promise."

"You'd better or we won't ever forgive you," Amber threatened, jokingly.

"Well, then. We'll see you tomorrow," Taylor said, "Take care of yourself."

"I will. Don't worry. I'll see you for the exam tomorrow," Rachel assured her one last time, waving as her friends walked off. When they were gone, she slowly lowered her arm and the smile faded from her face. She hoped she wasn't making a mistake.

The next day the four mermaids walked to school in silence. They were each revising last minute information in their heads. Amber had a book in hand, paging through it panicking. She definitely didn't feel prepared. As they walked onto the school ground, she closed the book. "I give up," she muttered, "He should just fail me and let me go home."

"You won't fail. You studied with us all evening and you weren't that bad. Sure, you won't beat Emily or Rachel, but you won't fail either," Sarah assured her.

"Just do your best," Taylor added.

They entered the exam room and took a seat in a row. "Rachel isn't here yet," Emily remarked, a hint worried.

"She'll be here soon, don't worry," Taylor replied. When the bell chimed however and Mr. Martin came in, Rachel still hadn't shown up. The girls in spite of this didn't have time to worry, seeing the exam was being handed out.

A few hours later the girls had to hand in their exams. "That wasn't too bad," Emily said, stretching her arms.

"Speak for yourself," Amber replied, though even she knew she had gotten several questions right and wouldn't be failing the exam completely.

"I think I did okay," Sarah suspected.

"Something is wrong," Taylor told them, making them look at her, "Rachel didn't show up."

"Maybe she was afraid of the exam?" Amber suggested with a shrug.

"It was the science exam. There is no way she was scared of that," Taylor objected.

"Maybe she got sick," Sarah said, "Let's go to her house and see if she's there." Still the group felt uneasy about Rachel's disappearance.

A while later they arrived at Rachel's house. Charlotte opened the door. "Hello girls. How did the exam go? Where is Rachel?" she asked, looking at them.

"Fine," Emily replied, but then frowned, "Isn't Rachel here?"

"No. She hasn't been here since yesterday morning. She told me that she would go to your house to study and stay the night," Charlotte told them perplexed, "Why? Is something wrong?"

"It's nothing," Sarah quickly answered, not wanting their mothers' former enemy to worry, "We must have overseen her on the way out of the exam. We'll call her. Thanks. Bye."

In a hurry they got a safe distance between themselves and the house before speaking. "So Rachel wasn't here last night," Sarah said.

"Not only that she lied to her mom about where she was," Emily pointed.

"Actually she lied to both of us," Amber corrected her.

"But where is she now? Where has she been since yesterday afternoon? We don't even know if she really was in the science club," Taylor asked, "Marissa could have gotten to her by now."

"Wait. I'll call Ryan," Sarah said as she pulled out her phone. After a short talk she hung up again and turned to her friends. "Well Rachel was at the science club and she went home with some others. Also she seemed to be acting normal," she told them.

"So Marissa really did catch her some time before she got home and after she had left the group," Amber summarized.

"But they usually split up at the corner to Rachel's street," Taylor objected, "The others would have heard something, if Marissa had attacked her." The others had to admit she had a point.

"Listen, I hate to rush this, but the full moon is rising soon. We have to get home quickly," Emily reminded them. The other nodded as they hurried to their house.

Although they planned on studying, they couldn't get themselves to do so. They worried about Rachel. Distraction came when Taylor's phone rang. It was an unknown number. "Hello," she answered.

"Hey, this is Alex," a voice replied.

Alex, it took Taylor a moment, but then she remembered. Rachel's boyfriend. "What can I do for you?" Taylor asked.

"I've been trying to reach Rachel without success, so I called your number, which she gave me," Alex explained, "I was afraid something might have happened after this morning's phone call."

Taylor put him on loudspeaker, realizing this was urgent. "What do you mean?" she questioned, "What call?" Usually Rachel told them how Alex was doing when she called him, seeing he was their friend

too.

"She called me this morning and asked what to do when your heart is telling you one thing and your head another," Alex told them.

"And what did you say?" Sarah asked.

"I told her to follow her heart," Alex answered, "She then hung up and I've been worried ever since. I tried to call her again, but she wouldn't answer. What happened?" The despair was clear in his voice.

"We think Marissa got her," Emily told him carefully.

"Damn it," Alex whispered.

"Listen, we'll do what we can. We won't let Marissa hurt Rachel," Amber assured him.

"I have faith in you. Call me as soon as you have her," Alex said and then hung up.

Silence filled the room once more. He had faith in them and all they could do is sit around and do nothing. With the full moon almost up, they would have to wait until the next morning and pray Rachel would be alright until then.

"Oh my god," Emily suddenly whispered, making them all look up.

"What?" the others asked.

"I just realized something. Rachel lied to both us and her mom, so that we wouldn't worry about her. Plus there is that weird question she asked Alex," Emily said and the others nodded, "What if, she planned it all to get a chance to talk to Marissa."

"No way!" Amber objected, "Rachel wouldn't be that stupid."

"But she did believe Marissa could be saved," Sarah pointed out.

"But to go alone is suicide," Amber protested.

"Rachel must see that differently," Emily replied.

Just then Taylor remembered what Rachel had said the day before. "She does see it differently," she spoke up, making the others look at her, "Yesterday she said she would do everything she could to save Marissa."

"Maybe if Rachel went willingly, she's okay now," Amber suggested, hopefully.

As if to shatter that hope, they heard a splash of water against the door. They hurried to the door and gasped. Lying in a puddle of water was Rachel's necklace with a note. Luckily the full moon hadn't raised enough to moonstruck them yet, but the time was limited. Carefully Amber dried both before taking them inside and opening the note. "I have something you want," she read. Her teeth clenched. "So

either way she now had Rachel. She would never take that off," Amber said.

"We have to help her," Sarah spoke up.

"How do we do that? We're no match for her and it's a full moon. We don't stand a chance," Emily objected.

"But if we don't act soon then we have no idea what she'll do to Rachel," Amber protested.

Emily bit down on her lip and gave a small curse. "Okay. We're going," she gave in, "We will save Rachel, no matter what."

The three turned to the door, which gave them a view of the ocean with Mako Island in the distance. "I'm sorry," a voice said so softly, that it took them a moment to realize it was Taylor's. Confused they turned to their friend, who stood a bit behind them. Taylor took a deep breath and told them, "I can't go with you."

****A/N: ****Rachel has been taken by Marissa and Taylor refuses to go up against her friend. Will the girls stand a chance against Marissa with only three mermaids and the full moon upon them? Can they stop Marissa before it's too late? The climax is next! Please review.

24. Memories

****A/N:** Well we've reached the climax of this story. A big thanks to everyone who has stuck around this long. Now it's time to see how this showdown finally ends. Here is chapter 24. Enjoy!**

Previously... Rachel becomes the target of Marissa's attacks. The others try to protect her, but in the end she is captured. They intend to go after Marissa, but Taylor backs out at the last moment. Also Rachel starts to fear the water more and more as it begins to hurt her. Now on to the chapter._

Chapter 24: Memories

"I'm sorry," Taylor said carefully, "I can't go with you."

The girls stared at her. What was going on? "Why?" Emily asked perplexed.

"I know you'll call me crazy, but I can't hurt Marissa. You don't have to remind me that she has done many horrible things, but no matter how I look at Marissa, I only see her from back then and I can't hurt that person," Taylor explained.

"You're right. You are crazy. She kidnapped Rachel. That should be enough to convince you," Amber told her, "Or isn't Rachel your friend?"

Taylor clenched her teeth, on the verge of tears. "She is, but I can't just go after Marissa," she replied, "I knew this was coming for a long time and I always asked myself which side I would take. It

seemed to vary every now and then until I realized I can't go against either of you." Taylor looked at her friends. "Besides I have faith that you'll bring Rachel back safely," she added.

Her friends stared at her. "Taylor," Sarah finally said softly.

"Fine, do what you want," Amber gave in, although her words were harsh, they sounded kind.

"Don't worry, we'll bring her back," Emily assured her.

Taylor looked up at them. What had she done to deserve such good friends? "Thank you," she said, "Are you sure you're okay with this?"

"We are," Amber retorted firmly, "Don't worry. We'll bring her back."

"We'll be back before you know it," Sarah added.

"Back from where?" Rikki asked, suddenly appearing alongside her friends at the door. The girls knew they had forgotten something. In quick words they summarized what had happened.

"My word. How do you keep getting caught up in this?" Emma questioned.

"It's not like we plan to," Emily answered.

"And you were planning on leaving without telling us again?" Rikki inquired, a hint of annoyance in her voice.

"It's sort of last minute," Amber objected.

"Please. They have to save Rachel," Taylor spoke up.

"Enough," Cleo retorted, cutting everyone off, "Go."

"What?" all four asked at the same time. They had expected at least some protest.

"Go. We won't be able to stop you anyway. Plus we also want Rachel back safely, but take care of yourself. We want you all back safe and sound," Cleo told them. The trio nodded as they turned to the door. Lowering their gaze to avoid seeing the full moon, they ran to the dock and dove in. The mothers and Taylor watched them.

"Is this really okay with you?" a voice suddenly asked, making her turn around. It was James.

* * *

><p>Meanwhile Sarah, Amber and Emily zoomed through the water. They quickly arrived at Mako. When they surfaced in the moon pool, they instantly found what they were looking for. Rachel laid on a rock ledge. "Rachel!" they exclaimed as they hurried to her after Amber had dried them off. Her face was pale and she didn't move.<p>

Sarah stared at her horrified. "Is sheâ€|?" Sarah asked, but she

couldn't finish it as Emily felt for a pulse.

"She's alive," she breathed as she stepped back, "Probably unconscious."

"Thank goodness," Amber whispered, "If Marissa had hurt her, she would be in a world of trouble."

"You must really consider me a monster, if you think I would kill her, simply to get to you," a voice spoke up, making the trio turn around. Leaning against the wall, they saw Marissa with her arms crossed.

"Aren't you a monster for kidnapping her?" Amber remarked.

"She willingly went to meet me," Marissa objected.

"And you blindsided her," Sarah retorted.

"Whatever," Marissa shrugged and then her eyes scanned the group.

"You must really underestimate me, if you come alone," Marissa said as she stepped away from the wall, "Where is Taylor? Did she refuse to come?" Although the girls didn't answer, their expression spoke volumes. "So she won't even face me," Marissa mused.

"She refuses to face you, because she still believes that there is some good inside you," Amber retorted, "Personally I think she's delusional."

"Anyway it's not too late to prove her right," Emily told her, "You might not care for us, but you do care for Taylor. Please don't disappoint her. She's believed all her life in you."

Marissa seemed to pause for a moment. Then she smiled. "Then neither of you know who I really am," she sneered and created a gust of wind, knocking them off their feet. Shaking they got back on their feet. "I'll give you that. You are persistent, but that won't get you anywhere," Marissa told them. She raised her hand at the same time as Sarah. Marissa's wind crashed against Sarah's water shield, which somehow withstood the attack. "Then how about this?" Marissa asked as he hurled a tentacle of water at the shield. It hit and a second later the shield shattered, causing all three to fall backwards.

Before any of them could move three ice spears landed mere inches next to them. Looking up they saw Marissa with several spears in hand. "You know what I like about your power, Amber?" she asked, causing Amber to shake her head, "The ability to kill a person alone and in so many ways. Sarah's power just has no ferocity, unless you count drowning or dropping someone out of the air. That's not fun enough. Emily's could of course freeze someone to death, but personally I find it works much better together with Sarah's to make these spears. No, Amber. Yours, the ability to burn, to give people a seemingly endless death until they beg for it to end it quickly, is the greatest power." Madness flashed in Marissa's eyes.

"You're crazy. That's not what my power should be used for," Amber snapped, remembering all too well that she nearly had killed a person

by accident.

"I'm feeling generous today. I'll let you decide your death. You get to choose between the spears," Marissa told them, smirking, "Or to die by our own powers. Personally I find killing you with your own powers much more fitting, but I don't care. Once you're out of the way, the pesky humans will follow." The girls stared at her. Marissa was insane and what made it worse was that they knew she would do it. They simply kept their mouths shut. "No requests?" Marissa asked, "Well then I'll decide for you. Shall I give Rachel a message from you when she wakes up?" Slowly she raised her hand until it was perfectly aligned with the three on the ground. "Good bye. It was fun while it lasted," she smiled.

"Don't do it, Marissa!" someone suddenly yelled as a blurred figure stepped before them. Sarah, Amber and Emily looked up to see Taylor standing protectively in front of them. Her arms spread out.

"Taylor," the girls whispered, astonished. They hadn't expected her to show up.

"Get out of the way!" Marissa demanded, her hand still raised.

She shook her head, retorting, "No way." Usually Taylor would have done what her friend said, but not this time. Back then following her friend's order meant safety for her. It meant leaving the hard decisions up to Marissa, knowing she would make the best one. If she did that now, Taylor knew she would have the blood of all four of her newly acquired friends on her hands.

"I'll say it one last time, because you are my friend. Leave now! I have no grudge against you," Marissa repeated, angrily, "At least not yet."

"And I'll say it again as your friend too. I'm not leaving," Taylor objected, looking into her friend's eyes, trying to find the friend from so long ago, but she couldn't find, "If you want to harm them, then you have to go through me first. I won't let you hurt them."

Marissa stared at Taylor, her eyes suddenly growing a bit softer. "How Taylor? How can you call yourself my friend, if you side with them? That's not what friends do," she questioned, hurt.

"We are, but they are my friends too. A friend, Marissa, wouldn't make me choose between you. Please stop before someone is seriously hurt. You'll always be my best friend. I owe you everything," Taylor pleaded, softly.

Marissa halted, seeing Taylor this way. "Taylor," Marissa whispered.

"Yes," Taylor replied, looking up. Had she finally come to her senses?

"I'm sorry," Marissa suddenly said, fiercely and used her magic to knock Taylor down, "If you side with the humans, then I have no choice, but to take you down with them." Taylor looked up at her friend. She didn't recognize her anymore. If she was still somewhere

in there, she was buried deep.

Taylor clenched her fists, trapping sand in between them. It couldn't end like this. Slowly she pushed herself up, her body protesting due to the fall. "I blame myself for it ever getting this far. Back then when this all started, I should have said something. Anything," she muttered with a shaking voice, "But I didn't. I was a coward. I ran away from that responsibility. I'm done. I'm done running away. I might not be a match against you, but I will do whatever I can to stop you."

"A heroic speech Taylor, but that's all it's going to be," Marissa told her and with a flick of her wrist sent her friend flying back to the ground with a strong gust of wind. "Now where was I before I was so rudely interrupted," Marissa said, "Ah yes. Destroying you."

Just then the moon peered over the edge of the volcano. The light from the moon fell onto the battle. However instead of the moon pool beginning to bubble and foam, the light seemed to shine down on the trio. A pale yellow glow seemed to embrace Emily, Sarah and Amber and they could feel their strength returning. "The moon..," Amber stammered, astonished.

"It's giving us energy," Emily said, looking down at her hand.

"Thank you," Sarah whispered. Taylor stared at them, amazed.

However the magical gift didn't affect Marissa and Taylor, who simply gaped. "How is this possible?" Marissa demanded to know, furiously. Slowly it dawned on Taylor. They had given up their connection to the moon. That meant they were no longer affected by it when it was full, but they also weren't able to get such gifts. The others meanwhile had to fear the full moon, due to their strong bond with the moon, but in exchange the moon helped when they needed it.

"It doesn't matter," Marissa spat, "I'll finish you off, with or without your moon's enhancement."

"Don't count on it," Emily smiled as she reached out her hand and took Sarah's hand.

"Together with the moon, we won't lose," Sarah added and grasped Amber's hand.

"When we combine our magic, we are unstoppable," Amber said and they stood up in perfect synchronicity. Then Amber held her hand out to Taylor. She looked at the hand hesitantly, but then took it. Suddenly she felt connected to every single one of them, aware of everything they are aware of. They felt like one body, one soul. She could feel the magic inside them. The strong moon magic, which pulsed through their veins, like blood. It was breathtaking and scary at the same time how powerful they felt.

"Now together," Sarah told them as the trio released each others hands. Although they were no longer physically connected, they still felt like one unit. Taylor however held Amber's hand, knowing somehow that if she did let go that she would sever their tie. Each of them raised their hands at the same time. A tentacle zoomed from them towards Marissa.

"Now it's getting interesting," Marissa smiled, her eyes shining with excitement, as she too raised her hand and created her own tentacle, which clashed with the other. When they met, the force pushed both parties back, sending sand flying everywhere. They were even. Neither tentacle budged an inch, locked in a stalemate. Taylor was astonished. Never in a million years had she expected that they could go up to Marissa and actually stand a chance.

Marissa too realized that they were even and it surprised her. She never would have expected this. A plan. She needed a plan. Then it came to her. "Then I'll attack the traitor," Marissa smiled and used her free hand to send forth a jelly tentacle towards Taylor. Instinctively she stopped giving her energy to their united blast to create her own tentacle.

As the two jelly tentacles hit one another, it felt like a shock ran through Taylor. Her eyes snapped shut and she could only faintly hear the cries of her name from her comrades, even though they were right beside her before everything went dark. Even though her eyes were closed, a bright light blinded her and everything seemed to be spinning.

_When Taylor finally opened her eyes, she was looking out a window onto a street. Every now and then cars passed and occasionally a few pedestrians. Taylor had seen the view before, but couldn't place it. Also something was different than usual. She had no control over what she saw. Couldn't move her head or any other body part. On top of that Taylor felt surrounded by a sea of sadness, which she was pretty sure wasn't her own. _

Just then a family of three, two parents and a little girl walked past the window. "Mama, can we go to the beach later?" the little girl asked, tugging on her mother's skirt. Her mother smiled and nodded while the little girl was lifted up by her father. Suddenly the feeling of sadness and loneliness intensified so much that it swamped all of Taylor's other senses and it was almost too agonizing to bear.

_A noise from behind her, made her vision turn to the room. It was bleak room, lacking in color and joy. She was staring up at a woman behind a desk. It took her a moment to realize that it was the headmistress of the foster home, but a lot younger with less gray hair than Taylor remembered. "Why aren't my mommy and daddy here?" a childish voice asked, full of confusion and sorrow. Taylor knew it wasn't her voice. What was going on here? _

_"The answer won't change no matter how much you ask. Your parents left you on our doorstep, saying to take care of you, Christina," the headmistress replied, little comforting, "They said they would be back for you later." Christina? Taylor tried to think of anyone she knew by that name, but came up empty handed. Yet at the same time she was sure that she knew this person. _

"_That was 4 years ago," the girl protested. _

_"Your parents are probably very busy," the headmistress objected.

_

_"I don't care! I'm tired of waiting!" Christina yelled and Taylor

could feel tears rolling down the girl's cheeks. _

"Be reasonable, Christina," the headmistress began, but the little girl interrupted, "I hate that name! I hate my parents! I don't want to be their Christina anymore! From now on I'll be Marissa!" As the girl said those words, everything fell into place for Taylor. This little girl was her friend Marissa, though this was the first time she had heard of this or even seen Marissa like this. This girl was nothing like the Marissa she would probably meet only a few months later.

A bright light flashed before Taylor's eyes and when it disappeared a different scene was before her. She now stood at a door, a woman looked down at her, smiling. "Don't worry, I'll take good care of her," the woman said, whether it was to Marissa or the lady holding on to Marissa, Taylor couldn't say. Taylor, or to put it better, Marissa smiled. It was her first foster family and she wanted to be approved of. She was filled with hope. Hope that she would finally be away from those toddler sitters, who were way too strict. The woman took Marissa's hand, a gentle touch, which filled Marissa with the feeling of belonging. Finally she had a family, something she had longed for so long. Marissa stepped into the house.

_Taylor was curious to see what the house was like, but in that moment the blinding light returned and cutting her off. A small kitchen, dirty and very old, appeared in her view next. The woman sat at the table, eating breakfast. Bacon and eggs. Marissa walked into the room and trudged over to the fridge. "I don't believe I heard a good morning," the woman snapped, her words were slightly slurred. It was then that Taylor noticed the biting stench of alcohol in the air. This woman was drunk. Very drunk. _

_Marissa flinched in fear. "I'm sorry. Good morning," Marissa stammered and quickly opened the fridge. She got out a carton of milk and then went on to gather a bowl and cereal, which she was hard for her to reach due to her size. Finally she had however gotten everything together. _

_Sitting down at the table, she made herself a bowl of cereal. Taking a bite Marissa realized that the milk was nearly spoiled. Still she didn't complain. She knew better. Looking up, Marissa looked at the bacon. Taylor could feel her desire for a piece, no matter how small. The woman noticed too. "What do you want?" she asked. _

_"Can't I have a small piece?" Marissa replied, softly. _

_"I have to provide dinner and breakfast for you. There it is," she retorted, pointing at the cereal. A picture of a slab of bread and honey appeared before Taylor. She remembered that Marissa had always hated honey and she believed she had just stumbled over the reason why. _

Silently Marissa finished her breakfast and went to bring her bowl to the sink where already a huge pile of dirty dishes already laid. Taylor's stomach revolted slightly, seeing that some of those dishes must have been there for at least a week. Marissa stood on her tippy toes and tried to place her bowl on the pile. Suddenly the tower of dishes began to tip and came crashing down around Marissa.

_The woman instantly shot up to see the little blonde girl standing

in the middle of a sea of shards. As the woman towered Taylor could feel fear rise in Marissa. "I'm sorry. It was an accident," Marissa stammered, her eyes wide, "I swear." _

_ "Don't lie. You did this on purpose," the woman accused, "I'll be calling the foster home. I won't put up with someone like you, but first we'll have to teach you that doing stuff like this is not nice." Marissa cowered against the counter, but it was no use. When that first slap hit Marissa, Taylor knew that not just her innocents had been lost, but much more. Right then and there Marissa realized that it didn't matter if you told the truth or lied. That people only supposedly wanted what's best for her. That the only one you could depend on was yourself.
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_ The light flashed once more. As if she was watching a clip show, Taylor watched Marissa get shipped from one foster family to the next. In one she did all the chores, in another she was forced to sleep in something that could have just as well been a closet. Instead of simply enduring it, Marissa rebelled more and more, her hatred for these people growing with every experience. _

_ Between those events was one that filled Marissa's cold heart with warmth. Taylor recognized it instantly. It was the day she and Marissa had met. She had felt sorry for the innocent girl. There was one sentence that filled the memory. "I will protect this girl from any harm. She should not have to see what I saw," Taylor heard Marissa's thoughts back then say. It touched Taylor to know that her friend had cared so much for her._

_ However then this moment was replaced by more painful ones, until Marissa decided she would simply stay in the foster house, not wanting to bare it anymore. Taylor soon joined her and together they became inseparable. They acquired their mermaid powers, which seemed to be one of the few memories Marissa seemed happy about._

_ Finally the light flashed again to reveal the next scene. The washrooms of the foster house appeared before Taylor's eyes. Marissa's face was staring back at her through a mirror. Judging from the way she looked, Taylor guessed she was about 9. Looking down there was a piece of cake in her hand. She was about to take a bite, when a person spoke up, "I believe that is the headmistress's cake, isn't it?" Startled she looked up to see Connor. He was a volunteer, who often helped out at the foster home. He was around 18 at the time. Taylor recalled that he had been one of the nicer ones._

_ "Please don't tell her," Marissa replied. _

_ "Don't worry. I won't," Connor replied with a smile that made Taylor shiver for some reason, "That is, if you give me something in return." _

_ "You want half of the cake?" Marissa asked, eying him. _

_ "I was thinking of something else," he answered as he closed the gap between them in a quick stride. Fear rose up in Marissa as Connor took a lock of her hair and put it to his mouth, kissing it. The way Connor looked at Marissa made Taylor's stomach revolt. Marissa's knees shook, but she didn't do anything. Calling for help was no use. No one would believe the problem child. In her head the urge to use

her powers was overwhelming, but one thing kept it back. Taylor. If she used her powers now, she would be endangering them both. Tears welled up in Taylor's eyes. Even in such moments Marissa thought of her. "Just use your powers!" she yelled, but it made no difference. She was simply an observer. This was simply a memory. Long gone in the flow of time.

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Suddenly the younger Taylor stood at the door. Connor let go of Marissa's hair and stepped back. Quickly Marissa hurried to her friend and they hurried off. However she didn't have any peace anymore. Now even her safe haven was destroyed. Constantly she felt Connor's gaze on her and all she knew how to do was stick to Taylor. Taylor hit herself. She hadn't noticed anything. What kind of friend was she?

Light flashed and the second it was gone Taylor recognized the fateful day. The day she had gone to live with Bella and Will. "I promise we'll see each other every day," Taylor told her, though her voice was full of nervousness.

_ "Don't worry. They'll love you," Marissa assured her and took her hand. Taylor nodded with a smile. Marissa smiled back. However inside Marissa Taylor knew it was a lie. She was screaming, "Don't leave me!" Every fiber of her body wanted her friend to stay by her side, to not leave her alone with Connor, and yet she let her go. _

_ "How had she not noticed?" was all Taylor could think. When Taylor was gone, Marissa turned back to see Connor. He smiled sweetly at her and Marissa felt like throwing up._

The light blinded her and suddenly Connor's face was right in front of hers. A wall pressed against her back and with his arms on either side of her there was no chance of escaping. No one would save her this time. "Now we can finally be alone," he told her. His breath smelled minty. Fear had taken control of Marissa and Taylor felt like it was herself, who was trapped. She looked to the side to see a faucet.

Suddenly something snapped inside Marissa and everything blurred as Marissa moved her hand. Something exploded nearby, the faucet as Marissa's memory told Taylor, causing Connor to go flying off of her. Astonished he stared up at the little girl, who held her hand over him in a threatening manner. "Youâ€|," he began, but Marissa interrupted, "Touch me or anyone ever again and you will regret it." Seeing the fear in his eyes, Marissa realized something. That there was a reason she had these powers. She was supposed to teach scum like this what it meant to have respect. No. Teaching them wouldn't be enough. Eliminating them was the only way. They were all alike. With her powers she was above them and now it was her job to right the wrongs they had done. She stepped to the door. With one last wave of her hand, causing another explosion, she left, not looking back. She never returned to the foster home.

The light flashed one last time, but this time only darkness followed. Taylor blinked several times as the images faded from her mind, trying to process what she had just seen. What was that? Had she just seen Marissa's memories? But how? More so all that she had seen was overwhelming. That was the Marissa she had never seen. It made her realize several things about her friend and once more send

her heart in a turmoil. Not only about Marissa, but about herself. She had never noticed that Marissa didn't live in the foster home anymore. Then she felt a tug on her mind before she was pulled back into reality.

When Taylor's eyes finally opened, she found herself on the ground of the volcano. Tears were streaming down her cheeks. Finally she noticed that her three friends were looking at her worried, even though they still held their attack. "Are you alright?" Sarah asked.

"What happened?" Emily questioned. Taylor just stared at them and then looked to Marissa. She had no idea. No idea whether she was alright or what had happened. She only knew one thing.

With a shaking hand Taylor wiped her tears away. Her legs trembled as she straightened up. Whatever had happened Taylor felt drained. Looking down at her hand, she released her grip on Amber's hand, severing her magical connection to the others and took a step forward.

"What are you doing, Taylor?" Amber demanded, "Get back."

Taylor shook her head, not looking back at her friends, although she could feel their confused gazes on her back. "This is not the answer," Taylor said as she took another step towards Marissa.

"Stay back, Taylor," Marissa warned, raising her free hand towards her. Taylor shook her head. "If you want, attack me. I'm not leaving your side. Not again," Taylor told her, taking another step towards her, "You're not alone anymore, Christina."

Marissa's eyes widened as she realized what Taylor had called her. "How do you know that name?" Marissa demanded to know, but her hand wavered.

"Does it matter? I don't care whether you're Christina or Marissa. You both have pain and I want to help you overcome it," Taylor replied and took her final step so that she was now directly in front of Marissa's outstretched hand, "I may have been blind before, but you shouldn't be the only one to suffer." With that she reached her hand out and carefully placed it on Marissa's hand that was aimed at her. Marissa didn't move, her eyes still on Taylor. "Please stop this. You were hurt, I know, but not everyone is like that. If you do not trust them, then trust me. Do you really think I would be friends with people if they did stuff like that?" Taylor went on as her hand slowly reached out for Marissa's which still held the attack, "Believe me, Christina. Let me help you." Marissa's eyes grew soft. She was torn. Torn between her love for Taylor and the deep hatred that had manifested itself deep inside her against those humans.

Sarah, Amber and Emily simply stared. They had no idea what was going on, but whatever Taylor was doing, it was working. Feeling Marissa's power go back a bit, they also did the same, fearing that they might accidentally hurt Taylor, if Marissa suddenly stopped her attack. However they were still ready to attack full on, if Marissa changed her mind once more.

Just then the full moon maneuvered itself directly over the moon

pool. The edges of the volcano outlining the moon. Suddenly the magic inside the volcano intensified even more. Amber, Emily and Sarah could feel more and more magic flow through them and into their tentacle. Horrified they saw their attack pushing Marissa's back. "We have to stop," Emily told them.

"But how? We're like a broken dam," Amber retorted as she realized with horror that they no longer had any control over what the magic did.

"We can't hurt Taylor," Sarah objected as their magic pushed Marissa back more and more.

"Unless you have an idea how to seal ourselves off from the moon, we're screwed," Amber retorted.

"Taylor! Get out of the way!" Emily exclaimed, making the two friends turn to them.

Suddenly Marissa's tentacle shattered, completely overwhelmed, and the uncontrolled moon magic shot towards Taylor and Marissa. "Watch out!" Emily, Sarah and Amber exclaimed. Marissa's and Taylor's eyes widened. In the last second Taylor pushed Marissa out of the way. Stumbling to the ground, Marissa watched her friend get hit by the tentacle full force and get hurled to the ground. The silence was deadly.

"Taylor!" Marissa exclaimed as she crawled to her friend, "You idiot! Why did you do that? It was meant for me!" The trio stared at Taylor lying on the ground. "It should have been me. If anyone deserved to die, it was me. You shouldn't have gotten involved," Marissa muttered, staring at her friend. She felt something wet roll down her cheeks. Carefully she touched them and looked at her hand. Tears. Marissa couldn't remember the last time she had cried.

Sarah, Amber and Emily finally broke free from their trance. Seeing the person that had hunted them broken down in tears was a shock. Slowly they came up to her. "She was never supposed to get hurt. I did this for us. I wanted to give her a world that she could feel safe in," Marissa whispered.

"But she had that," Amber objected, "At least once she was with Bella. Why did you continue?"

"Probably it just became a reason for me to attack more people," Marissa retorted, burying her head in her hands, "To prove I was actually worth something and not just some abandoned girl."

"Taylor," a shaking voice suddenly said. Looking up they saw that Rachel had woken up.

"Rachel, thank goodness," Sarah whispered as Rachel got up and walked to them.

"What happened?" Rachel asked, softly, her eyes glued to Taylor.

"We should be asking you that," Emily answered, "You ran off to meet Marissa on your own." Rachel looked to the side, embarrassed.

"I think it's time we talk," a voice said, making the girls look down. Taylor's eyes were partially open.

"Taylor," they all whispered.

"We all need to talk," she told them, her eyes meeting each of theirs.

****A/N: ****Marissa's rampage is stopped and Taylor is alive, but is it really over? What happened between Marissa and Rachel? Why did Taylor show up after all? Will Marissa be able to provide them with answers? Please review.

25. Epilog

****A/N:** This is the final chapter. I'm sorry it took me so long. College was brutal. I had exams and a pile of homework from here to the moon. Luckily I finally found the time to finish this story. A huge thanks to everyone who stuck around this far, making this series so successful. You are awesome. As I have no further ideas, I can't say, if there will be more installments later. However I will definitely upload something again, whether or not it will still be in the H2O category, I can't say. If it isn't, I hope that if you know the category, you'll continue to follow me. Anyway here is the last chapter. Enjoy!
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_Previously... The final showdown between Marissa and the others was at its climax. Taylor somehow entered Marissa's thoughts and saw the horrors her friend had gone through. She was able to talk her down, but got hit by the blast of the others. Now they're ready to talk it out. Now on to the chapter. _

Epilog

After Marissa had helped Taylor into an upright position, the six girls looked at each other in silence. "So where do we start?" Sarah asked, unsure.

"How about at the beginning?" Taylor suggested her, her voice shaking a bit as she turned to Marissa, "Christina?"

Marissa stared at her friend confused. "How do you know that name?" she asked, softly.

"Who is Christina?" Amber inquired, slightly confused.

Marissa bit her lip before she answered, "Christina is the name my parents gave me, but I rejected it early on when I realized they weren't coming back for me. What I don't understand is how you know that name." She looked at Taylor for an answer.

"You didn't notice anything?" Taylor questioned surprised, "Back when our tentacles met I guess I sort of was launched into your memories. I saw your memories from your point of view."

The five girls could see Marissa go pale, her skin becoming almost translucent. "Which?" she stammered, horrified, "Which memories did you see?"

It was now that Taylor realized how much she had invaded Marissa's privacy. Those memories weren't pretty, to say the least. "Where you gave up your name, your first family, saving me, you feeling betrayed by me andâ€¦ Connor," Taylor told her carefully. As Taylor listed them she thought she could almost see her friend reliving the memories in her head. Marissa's hands shook and Taylor carefully took her hand in her own. The other four obviously didn't understand a word of what was going on, but they could tell whatever those memories were about that they weren't pleasant.

"Why didn't you ever tell me any of this?" Taylor asked, looking at her.

"It was bad enough living through it once. I didn't want to relive it a second time. Besides it had nothing to do with you," Marissa answered, coolly.

"But then why didn't you at least tell me about Connor? I could have stayed," Taylor questioned, confused.

"And what would you have been able to do, except be another target," Marissa objected, firmly and then added softly, "That was the one thing I didn't want. I didn't want you to get hurt. I wanted you to have the life I could never have. One without worry or fear or at least as much as that was possible."

Taylor stared at her friend. Although she thought her friend was illogical, she knew that her younger self never would have stood a chance against all the stuff Marissa had protected her from. She wrapped her arms around Marissa and whispered, "Thank you."

"Then at least now you understand why I hate humans," she told her.

"I understand the reasoning, but I still don't like that you did it," Taylor retorted, "There are better ways to do that. It's no excuse that you had a rough life and wanted to get even."

"I was also doing this for you," Marissa objected, weakly.

"Maybe in the beginning," Taylor pointed out, coolly, "But what about when I sided with Rachel, Amber, Emily and Sarah? At that point you knew how I felt about this. No, at that point I was an excuse so you wouldn't feel as bad."

Not just Marissa stared at Taylor shocked, but all the others as well. They had never heard Taylor talk like this. "I promise I won't do something like that again," Marissa said, softly, like a beaten dog.

"You'd better or it would be the last time we were friends," Taylor told her. She knew she was being harsh, but it seemed to be the only way to get through to her stubborn friend.

"I understand," Marissa whispered with a bowed head.

Taylor gently lifted her friend's head. "But you are right now my best friend," she told her and Marissa's demeanor lightened a bit.

"Is that why you suddenly decided to go up against Marissa after all?" Sarah asked, looking at Taylor.

"In a sense," Taylor answered as her mind went back to only a bit ago.

"_Is this really okay with you?" James suddenly asked. _

_Startled Taylor turned around to face him. "It's for the best," she answered, "I can't face Marissa." _

_"So your answer is to simply see who wins and hope the other party is still alive?" he demanded to know, making Taylor flinch at his harsh words, "You know my sister and the others don't stand a chance against Marissa without you." _

"No," she muttered, shaken.

_ "It sure looks like it," James retorted. _

"I just don't want to hurt Marissa," Taylor objected on the verge of tears.

"_Let me ask you one thing. Is that really the person you were once friends with?" he asked, looking at her. _

_Taylor shook her head, whispering, "No, she was nothing like that." _

_"Whatever happened to her really affected her and the only one who might be able to get through to her and bring back her usual self is you. If you can't do it, no one can," James told her. _

Taylor stared at James and then out at Mako. Finally she stepped towards James and gave him a light peck on the lips. "Thank you," she whispered, "I'll do my best to bring them back. All of them." With that she turned to the door.

Emily stared at Taylor. "Wow, my brother can be brutal," she said, amazed.

"But it worked," Taylor replied.

"Maybe he should be a motivational speaker," Marissa smirked. The group gave Marissa a look. Even when she was apparently not their enemy anymore, she still seemed to have bad remarks for everyone.

"So what happened between you two?" Emily asked, looking from Rachel to Marissa, trying to get away from that subject.

"Simple, I wanted to talk, she came and I took her with me so we could talk without being disturbed," Marissa explained. Rachel nodded in agreement.

"So you kidnapped her," Amber summarized.

"If you want to call it that," Marissa shrugged, "I don't get it though."

"Get what?" Emily questioned.

"You," Marissa replied, her gaze falling on Rachel, "Why do you only draw on the magic of the moon stones in your necklace? Why didn't you ever use your magic to defend yourself against me when I attacked you before or even when I 'kidnapped' you?"

Rachel looked to the side as her hand clutched around the stones. "Didn't Taylor tell you?" she asked, "I'm not a mermaid anymore. I lost my magic."

Marissa narrowed her eyes. "What happened?" she asked. Her voice wasn't taunting, simply serious, almost curious.

"I lost my powers last year when I was possessed by a spirit, which had been draining our power. The others were able to save me, but my powers were gone ever since," Rachel told her.

Marissa stared for a moment, only to burst out laughing. "What's so funny?" Amber demanded to know.

"Apparently you," she answered, smirking, "Have you ever given that necklace to a human?" Rachel nodded confused. "And what happened? Nothing right," Marissa retorted, "If you were a normal human then you wouldn't be able to use the magic of that necklace."

"But she isn't. She was a mermaid. She knows how to reach magic," Sarah pointed out.

"It doesn't matter. A human cannot use magic, whether they were a mermaid before or not," Marissa retorted.

"Then that are you saying?" Rachel asked, confused.

"You really haven't figured it out?" Marissa questioned, "You're still a mermaid, always were."

"But she doesn't transform," Taylor objected, half wondering, if her friend had gone off the deep end.

Marissa leaned back with a smile. "Maybe it's time you tell them something, Rachel," she said, her eyes light with amusement.

"What are you talking about?" Amber asked, looking from the smug Marissa and then to Rachel. She looked away from her friends' prying gaze. How was she supposed to explain it? Slowly Rachel got up and walked over to the moon pool.

"Rachel," Taylor whispered confused as her friend kneeled down next to the water.

Slowly Rachel reached her hand out to the water. Millimeters from the surface, she stopped, knowing what was expecting her. She looked back at her friends one last time and then took a deep breath, thrusting her hand into the water. Instantly feeling of having touched a high voltage line coursed through her veins and all her senses shut down, leaving her with nothing but pain. Rachel was sure this was the end.

Suddenly she was jerked backwards, freeing her from the water.

Collapsing on the ground, she slowly opened her eyes to see four worried faces look down at her and one with indifference. Slowly her hearing came back and she heard Taylor asked, "Are you alright? What happened?" Rachel simply nodded, her voice still numbed.

Furiously Amber turned to Marissa. "What the hell? Why did you make her touch the water?" she demanded.

"I didn't make her do anything, mind you. I simply told her to tell you the truth. I never said that she had to show you," Marissa objected, unconcerned.

"Then you should have at least stopped her," Amber retorted.

Rachel laid a shaking hand on Amber. "I did it, knowing fully well what would happen," she told her as she slowly sat up. Amber scowled, but said nothing more.

"So what happened to you?" Emily asked, worried.

"Around the time that we met Taylor I started to feel strange whenever I touched the water. At first it was just a sensation, but it turned into a feeling of electricity running through me," Rachel told them.

The others stared at her. "Why didn't you ever tell us?" Sarah demanded to know.

"Because I wasn't even sure myself what was going on," Rachel replied on the verge of tears, "It just felt like the water hated me and wanted me dead. How was I supposed to tell you something like this when you love the water so much?" The four stared at her, unsure what to say.

"It's the opposite," Marissa spoke up, starting to get disgusted by the whole sob story as the others stared at her confused, "The water wants you back."

"What are you talking about?" Rachel asked.

"Weren't you listening earlier? You're still a mermaid," Marissa repeated.

"Apparently you weren't listening either. Rachel doesn't transform," Amber retorted annoyed.

Marissa sighed. "Because her power is locked up inside of her," she explained.

"Locked up inside?" Emily repeated confused. She had never heard of that and had no idea what it meant.

"Back when you nearly died the spirit was leeching your magic. It probably took every last drop it could get to keep from being defeated. However one teeny tiny droplet remained. The one that saved your life," Marissa explained, "Back when you first realized you were no longer able to transform it hadn't replenished enough to transform you. It takes a lot of time for magic to replenish, if it has been almost completely emptied."

"But why wasn't she able to transform after a few months? What does that weird pain have to do with all this?" Sarah questioned.

"I'm only guessing here myself, but I would say that giving her the necklace so she can use magic with it was the problem. Rachel got used to pulling power from it and not from herself," Marissa told them, "By the time her magic would have replenished enough to transform, which I guess was around the time you started searching for Taylor, Rachel had stopped using herself as a source."

"So her getting hurt has to do with not being able to transform?" Taylor summarized.

"Exactly. I can't say how for sure, but I would think that it is a safety mechanism that won't let Rachel transform until she willingly and consciously tries to do so, that activated itself when her magic was nearly depleted," Marissa went on, "As for the pain I believe that it's a side product of the safety mechanism. When a mermaid touches the water, she transforms. Rachel is a mermaid, but her transformation is hampered by the safety mechanism, which results in the pain because the water tries to change her, which her body won't allow. The pain probably intensifies the more of your power is back."

"So you're saying I could be a real mermaid again?" Rachel asked hesitantly, speaking up for the first time in a while. She felt overwhelmed.

"If that is what you wish. All you have to do is will yourself to do so," Marissa answered, "Though I think you could do the exact opposite too. You could willingly completely lock your mermaid half away, however then you wouldn't even be able to use that necklace of yours."

Rachel froze. What was she going to do? Sure she had dreamed of being a mermaid again for a whole year, but now that she actually had the chance she wasn't so sure. The water scared her. She couldn't forget the pain it had inflicted on her. On the other hand becoming a full human again also seemed strange. Not to mention wasn't she pushing herself even further away from the rest of the group.

Her gaze slowly fell on each of the friends. "You don't have to decide this right now," Taylor told her. Rachel shook her head. She had to decide this now or she knew she would put it off forever. Once more she stepped up to the moon pool, took a deep breath and stepped off the edge. Her body was instantly engulfed in the pain and any thoughts she had had of what she was going to do were gone. Her entire body spasmed and she was sure she was going to drown. She was going to die here, it shot through her as she started to panic.

The four others, who were worried, stared at her from the edge of the water. "Is she alright?" Sarah asked worried, seeing the water was slowly becoming electrically charged, due to Rachel.

"She hasn't grown a tail yet," Amber retorted.

"Maybe it takes time," Emily suggested.

"But she's in pain," Taylor objected, worried, "And she seems to be panicking." Suddenly they saw something go past them from the corner

of their vision and a second later there was a splash. Astonished they stared at the water as it calmed again from the sudden movement.

Marissa bite down on her lip as the electrified water shocked her a bit. She swam up to Rachel, who looked at her, but Marissa could tell that she wasn't focused on her. Raising her arm, Marissa slapped Rachel as hard as she could.

The sudden motion of her head brought Rachel back to slightly. Looking in front of her, she saw Marissa to her surprise. "Hurry up already," her eyes seemed to tell her. Rachel nodded as she closed her eyes. She still felt the pain, but she needed it. Searching, she looked for the origin of the pain. It meant enduring it, the closer she got to it, the more it intensified, but she found it and Rachel could feel a strange feeling inside her, that was however very familiar. Magic, Mako magic. At that point the pain was going to make her pass out soon. She had to hurry. Using all if the willpower she had, Rachel reached out at it and gave her magic a tug. A bright light flooded her consciousness.

The four others were still staring at the scene before them. Suddenly the water was engulfed by a bright light, making them stumble back and cover their eyes. Just as quickly as it had appeared, the light vanished again. As the four were still adjusting to the normal light, they heard the water breaking and two people gasping for air. When they were finally able to see again, they stared. Marissa as a mermaid was holding on to Rachel, whose body was still twitching a bit, but the most important part was that Rachel had a tail.

"Rachel," they said, smiling, "You're a mermaid."

Slowly Rachel realized it had worked. She was a mermaid. Marveling at her fin, she let her hands run over her body. It had really worked. "Thank you," she said to Marissa and then broke out into a grin, "And you say you hate everyone, but Taylor."

Marissa splashed her pouting, though it didn't seem convincing. "I could hardly let you drown," she replied, "Taylor would have my head."

Suddenly Taylor jumped into the moon pool and hugged her two friends. "I'm so glad you're getting along," she said.

"We're not getting along," Marissa objected, but Taylor simply flashed a knowing smile at her.

"Whatever you say," she replied.

Just then Amber, Sarah and Emily also jumped in, shouting, "Group hug!" Before Marissa was even able to react, she was forced into the middle of a huge mermaid group hug.

"Okay, this place is officially too small for 6 mermaids," she said, noticing that they were fairly cramped together.

"Ah, it's fine," Sarah replied, "We just have to organize ourselves better."

"We should get going back though," Emily reminded them, "The others are probably worried."

"I guess I'll be leaving then," Marissa said, somehow freeing herself from the knot.

Just as she was about to submerge, five hands grabbed a hold of her arm. "Where do you think you're going?" Taylor demanded to know.

Surprised Marissa looked at her. "Back to Ireland, I guess," she replied with a shrug.

"Wrong," Amber said.

"You're coming with us," Sarah told her.

"Why should I?" Marissa retorted.

"Because you're one of us, if nothing else," Emily told her with a smile.

Marissa stared at the five girls, who smiled at her and something warmed inside her. With a pout Marissa gave in, "Fine, but let me go." She pulled her arm free. The others smiled, knowing she was happier than she let on.

"Can we take a short detour on the way back?" Rachel asked.

"Anything you want," Sarah answered, knowing exactly what she wanted to do. With that they submerged and swam out of the moon pool. Out in the ocean Rachel zoomed off, swimming zigzag, doing corkscrews and simply enjoying her newly found powers without having to worry about pain. The others, even Marissa, found her contagious and they soon joined her in playfully racing, swimming or simply relaxing in the underwater paradise they called their partial home.

After nearly an hour the six finally swam back to the mainland. As Amber, Emily, Sarah, Rachel and Taylor emerged from the water they saw their families there, waiting for them. With the help from their families they were pulled from the water and hugged by them. There was a mutter of how are you and a reply from the mermaids, assuring them that they were fine.

When things finally seemed to have calmed down, James looked at their big group. "Where is Marissa?" he asked.

"Sorry to disappoint. I'm still alive," Marissa told him, finally having emerged from the water. She had stayed back watching the reunion and she wished that she could be a part of it as well. Bella stepped forward and reached her hand out. Marissa flinched, expecting a slap or something else, but the hand simply stayed extended.

"We're glad you're alright," Bella said, looking at Marissa. Cautiously Marissa took the offered hand and was pulled out of the water. Will came up to her with a towel and handed it to her. She half expected it to have barbs in it or something, but instead it was soft and fluffy.

As Marissa dried herself, she looked at her friend's parents. These were the parents she had always wanted. Kind, understanding. Taylor really had been blessed with having them. "Is everything alright, Marissa?" Taylor asked, seeing the daze expression of her friend.

"Yeah, everything is fine," Marissa replied, shaking her head slightly. She had to snap out of this. She must be really getting soft, if she had thoughts like that.

Just then Bella and Will stepped up to her. "Marissa, we have a question for you," Bella told her, making both Taylor and Marissa, but also the rest of the present people look at them, "Would you like to be adopted by us?"

Marissa stared at the two adults astonished, pretty sure she had misunderstood them. "You want to adopt me? After everything I've done?" she repeated, hesitantly. What was the catch? There had to be one.

"We believe everyone deserves a second chance. Yours is long overdue," Bella explained, "So if you're willing to give us humans a second chance, we will do the same."

Marissa stared from Bella and Will to the beaming face of Taylor, who nodded reassuringly. For as long as she could remember she had hated, despised humans and now here were two humans offering her a home, a family. The only thing she had ever wanted. It seemed too good to be true. There had to be a catch, but these were Taylor's parents. Did they really do such things? Still Marissa knew she had to walk a new path, if she wanted to keep Taylor as her friend, even if that path meant going against her instincts. "I think everyone deserves a second chance," Marissa finally said. Taylor leaped forward and threw her arms around her friend. When Taylor finally let Marissa go, Bella stood before her, her arms open for a hug. Hesitantly she stepped into it, expecting pain or something else. Instead Bella's arms gently wrapped around her and drew her into a loving hug. This is what Marissa always thought what it would feel like, if she had ever met her mother and she had given her a hug.

It seemed like ages before Bella finally released Marissa. "Good for you," Sarah said, coming up to her.

"I think this new begin will go well for all of you," Emily assured her.

"Just don't revert back to your old self," Amber warned.

"I have no intention of doing so," Marissa retorted, coolly.

"Besides she has Taylor to watch over her," Rachel pointed out.

"You're alright," a voice suddenly said, making Rachel whirl around as she recognized it. It was Alex.

With a broad smile she hurried over to him and hugged him, before pressing a kiss on his lips. "What are you doing here?" she asked,

ecstatic.

"I took the first train I could after I heard from the others that you had disappeared," he answered, "What happened and who is this?" His gaze had fallen on Marissa.

"It's a long story," Rachel replied.

"One I'm sure we all want to hear," Cleo said, "Why don't we go inside and you tell us what happened?"

The six mermaids were about to nod, when someone spoke up, "We want to hear it too, if that's okay." Looking to the side of the house, they saw Ryan, Jordan and Daniel.

"What are you doing here?" Amber asked confused at the new arrivals.

"Well Alex called us when he arrived here and imagine our shock to find out that you apparently were out fighting Marissa," Jordan replied, annoyed.

"Well excuse me for not having updated my GPS coordinates," Amber retorted, but still got a kiss from Jordan, who was simply happy that she was alive.

"We were simply worried," Ryan told them as Sarah hugged him.

"We're sorry. It was kind of sudden," she said, receiving a kiss from him.

"We just want to know that you're alright. We worry about you, you know," Daniel said before drawing Emily into a kiss.

"We'll try," she assured him.

"They get better at it actually. They even told us their plan this time," Rikki told them with a smirk.

"Let's go inside and listen to their story," Emily said and everyone followed her inside.

"I just remembered," Rachel suddenly said, "Because of all this I miss the science exam."

"Too bad," Marissa replied with a shrug.

"Too bad? I studied hard for that exam," she retorted.

"Next time I kidnap you I'll try to consider your schedule. Is that okay with you?" Marissa asked, mockingly, making everyone laugh. They told their story and finally it seemed their world was at peace. No one was attacking them. They were simply able to relax in each others' company.

The End

****A/N:**** That's the end for this story. I hope you enjoyed it. For the last time please review and I hope to see you in some of my future stories, whether they're H2O related or not.

End
file.